



WINTER

No. 990

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No. 990

Winter, 1951/1952

## MAGAZINE

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	PAGE
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE .. .. .	340
THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER (Illustrated) <i>by Osbert Lancaster</i>	341
JEAN COCTEAU : THE FRIVOLOUS PRINCE <i>by Geoffrey Wagner</i>	358
ELIZABETH SIDDAL : THE GHOST OF AN IDEA (Illustrated) <i>by Ida Procter</i>	368
A SPECIAL OCCASION (A Story) .. <i>by Joyce Cary</i>	387
FORGER VERSUS CRITIC .. .. <i>by Lawrence Gowing</i>	390
FROY AND HIS DIVA (A Story) .. <i>by Mary Murry</i>	396

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JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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OSBERT LANCASTER. His most recent book is *Façades and Faces*, and his most recent published illustrations have been for *Here's England* (Rupert Hart-Davis), for *London Night and Day* (Architectural Press) and, of course, the pocket cartoons in the *Daily Express*. Work in progress includes *All Done from Memory*.

GEOFFREY WAGNER is a young English writer at present a Fellow at Columbia University. During the war he served in the Welsh Guards. Amongst his published work are two volumes of poetry, a novel and translations of Baudelaire. His translation of the prose and poetry of Gérard de Nerval will be published shortly in England and America by Peter Owen and New Directions respectively.

IDA PROCTER writes short stories, articles and verse and her volume of short stories entitled *First House* was published by Dobson. She is especially interested in biographical studies of the life and work of artists.

JOYCE CARY studied art at Edinburgh and later joined the Nigerian Political service, but resigned through ill health. His most recent novels are *The Horse's Mouth*, *The Moonlight*, *A Fearful Joy* (Michael Joseph). He has written several books on Political Philosophy and poetry. His new novel, *A Prisoner of Grace*, will be published shortly.

LAWRENCE GOWING is Professor of Fine Art in the University of Durham and Principal of King Edward VII School of Art, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A painter who writes on painting: *Renoir* (Lindsay Drummond), *Vermeer* (Faber.)

MARY MURRY was born in Calcutta and completed her education at the University of Grenoble. While having to earn her living as a shorthand typist she has written plays and a novel; two of these plays written in Spanish have been published.

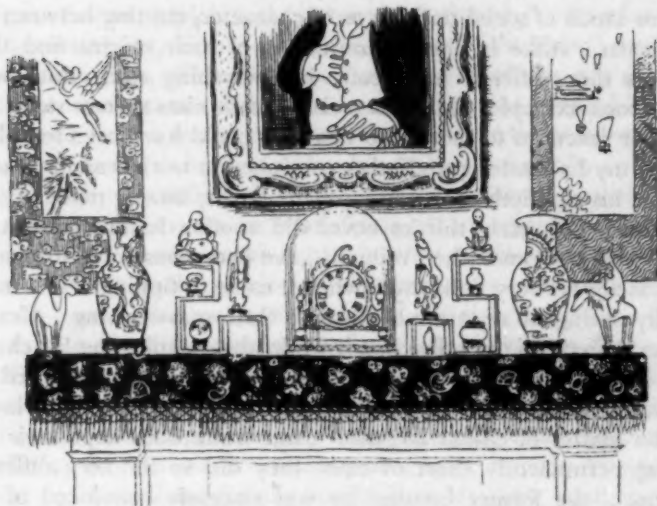
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[The Editor asks that all contributions should be addressed to him at 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1, and accompanied by a stamped envelope.]

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# The Last Rose of Summer

BY OSBERT LANCASTER



**A**N awareness of social distinctions is among the earliest senses to develop in the infant mind. All children, although in varying degrees, are snobs and if their snobbishness is based on differences and attributes incomprehensible to the adult mind their perception is none the less acute. Which always makes for a certain self-consciousness in the sensitive grown-up knowing himself to be under the scrutiny of a little rompered Proust who is weighing him up in accordance with a scale of values which although it may bear little relation to those of the Lord Chamberlain's Office or the Faubourg St. Germain, is none the less rigid for being arbitrary. Fortunately so few grown-ups do, in fact, in this respect appear to be sensitive.

Thus as a child I was always convinced that my maternal grandfather Alfred was in some subtle way 'grander' than my father's father. And this in the face of a considerable amount of superficial evidence supporting the contrary view. The latter, thanks to his beard, was the more imposing in appearance, and although both were rich he was the richer; moreover not only did he possess a town-house *and* a country-house but had also been knighted. Nevertheless, the former's house was approached by far the longer drive and was graced by a butler, and these two distinctions, particularly the latter, I considered decisive.



Naïve as may have been the premises on which my decision was based it was nevertheless accurately indicative of a subtle difference not so much of social position as of character, existing between the two men. Alike in the circumstances of their origins and their careers they differed completely in everything else. Both were copy-book examples of the Victorian middle class success story, but in their reactions to success no two men could have been less alike. While my Lancaster grandfather continued to work ceaselessly until almost his eightieth year, my mother's father, having made a large fortune by his early thirties never did another hand's turn in his life. While Grandfather William gave enormous sums to charity he was always very tight-fisted when it came to tipping which made family outings to restaurants always a little embarrassing. Grandfather Alfred, on the other hand, while always adjusting his charitable benefactions strictly in accordance with what he considered the minimum obligations of a country gentleman, was noticeably lavish in the matter of casual largesse. And while both kept their offspring permanently short of cash, they did so for very different reasons: the former because he was sincerely convinced of the corrupting influence of affluence on the young, the latter because he was temperamentally opposed to anyone spending his money but himself. Moreover, while my Lancaster grandfather, despite his genealogical preoccupations, remained always the least snobbish of men scorning—indeed disapproving—all social pretensions, his opposite number had never, according to his sisters, hesitated to cut his own father when the latter was still in 'trade' on any occasion when recognition would have been an imagined embarrassment. Alas, so desperately wicked is the heart of man and so blind to moral worth the eye of childhood, that while deeply respecting grandfather William, my admiration for grandfather Alfred knew no bounds.

My grandfather's great-grandfather had been a refugee who had preferred the more liberal climate of England to that prevailing in his native Marburg during the Revolutionary wars, and had settled in this country and married a lady known as 'the Rose of Shropshire' (whether or not she was so known outside the family circle I have been unable to discover). All his descendants had married in this country, and the only traces of their Teutonic origin that my mother's family still retained were exceedingly blonde colouring with very light Baltic eyes and the manuscript of a sermon allegedly preached by an ancestor who had been Hof-Prädiger to the Elector of Hesse-Cassel before Gustavus Adolphus on the eve of the Battle

of Lützen. All that was known of their German relatives was due to a correspondence with an engaging Baron entered into by my great-grandmother which had produced a rather dull coat-of-arms with the forthright, if non-committal, motto 'Ich Halte,' and a request for a loan. However, on the strength of this my great-grandfather had at one time considered adding the prefix 'Von' to his surname but fortunately had finally rejected the idea and thus saved his descendants considerable embarrassment in 1914.

In youth my grandfather's prospects had not been particularly rosy; his father, although in 'trade' was not very prosperously so, and all efforts to improve the family position by financial speculation had been markedly unsuccessful. A younger member of a large family he had in addition been considered delicate; but this in fact so far from being a disadvantage had proved a blessing. Thought to suffer from weak lungs it was arranged that the beardless youth should take a long sea voyage far from the fogs of South Kensington on a ship belonging to a maternal uncle who was establishing himself as a shipping magnate on the Yang-tse. Arrived in Hong-Kong he discovered that his elder brother, for whom a place had been secured in the uncle's business, was heartily sick of the Far East and unconcealedly anxious to return. My grandfather, then barely seventeen but apparently now well set up by the sea voyage, willingly exchanged places and remained at Hong-Kong for the next fifteen years during which period he married a dashing widow, succeeded his uncle as head of the line, and made a comfortable fortune.

Of all the various subsidiary Victorian societies, firmly bound by culture and temperament to the great central organisation yet flourishing in conditions almost unimaginably different, that of the China merchants—the 'tai-pans'—must, one fancies, have been one of the most extraordinary. The picture that presents itself, founded admittedly on no detailed knowledge but rather on half-remembered gossip, on the fantastic furniture and ornaments which adorned my grandfather's house, and above all on the testimony of old photograph albums, is one that can only be compared to that of the Lusignan régime in Cyprus; a small dominant group settled on the fringe of a far older but decayed civilisation, rigidly conservative and nationalist in some things, unexpectedly assimilative in others. In the matter of clothes, for instance, no compromise appears to have been made; indeed, to judge from portraits of my grandfather at this period an almost propagandist assertiveness of

Victorianism was *de rigueur*. Certainly the dundrearies would seem to be longer, the eyeglass more glistening, the neckwear heavier and more restrictive than they were even in St. James's Street. And nothing could well have made fewer concessions to local taste and conditions than Douglas Castle, the house built by the original Lepraik on the top of the Peak, a heavily machicolated granite mansion in the Scottish baronial style, in which my grandfather wed and my mother was born.

However, despite this architectural and sartorial rigidity, in other matters a far closer liaison would appear to have existed with the local culture than, say, in contemporary India. The British merchants met their Chinese colleagues on equal terms both socially and in business, and my grandfather had numerous Chinese friends, among them that Celestial Talleyrand, Li-Hung-Chang and if cases of intermarriage were rare, less regular unions would appear to have been frequent. But the field in which the maximum co-operation would seem to have been achieved and in which the results were most spectacular was that of furniture design.

No generation in recorded history, with the possible exception of the Renaissance Rhinelanders, conceived beauty so exclusively in terms of ornament as did the Victorians; no race at any time has achieved so great and terrifying a mastery of intricate detail as the Chinese of the post-Ming Period; it was not therefore surprising that the resulting combination of Victorian taste and Chinese craftsmanship produced a series of objects of transcendental monstrosity of which a very large proportion appeared to have found their way into the houses of my mother's relations. The one thing which these masterpieces of tortured ingenuity had in common was a total disregard of comfort or convenience. Thus china cupboards were supplied with such a multiplicity of little shelves projecting at all levels that it was impossible to dust or remove a single object without sending six others crashing; and chairs, the lines of whose framework were, although partially blurred by an abundance of prickly carving, flowing and sinuous, would be furnished with marble seats inlaid with mother-of-pearl of the most unyielding and chilly rigidity. But of all these mixed masterpieces the most extraordinary were my grandfather's racing trophies gained at Kailoon. Here the traditional debased vase-shape common to all such objects had been retained, but in the decoration the Chinese silversmiths had been allowed the utmost licence, so that every inch of surface was covered with spirited steeple-chasers conceived in the accepted

Alken tradition, entangled with dragons, whips and horseshoes wreathed with tiger-lilies and horses' masks peering out from bamboo thickets amid clouds of butterflies, all carried out in the highest possible relief.

Our annual arrival at the maternal homestead to which the treasures of Cathay lent so individual an atmosphere, was very different to our descent on Norfolk.<sup>1</sup> G——, Dorset, is not among the more attractive of West Country towns: always pervaded by a smell of brewing, neither its beer nor its inhabitants enjoy much regard in the surrounding countryside and its station, although larger, completely lacked the rustic charm of Eastwinch. Nevertheless, so keen was my anticipation of the pleasure to come, so powerful the recollected atmosphere annually reinforced, of my grandfather's house, that the dreary yellow brick station yard had for me a quite indescribable magic. In part this was no doubt due to the presence there of the grand-paternal automobile—a dashing, crimson Talbot-Darracq that made the Lancastrian Renault appear very dowdy and dowager-like; and standing alongside it smiling, rug-laden and gleamingly gaitered, the Chauffeur Bates.

It is not uncommon for a rare degree of insight and perception to be attributed to the innocent age of childhood; instances are constantly quoted of practised deceivers who had successfully hoodwinked the shrewdest adults but whose pretences were immediately penetrated by an innocent child. If there is any truth in such assumptions I can only suppose myself to have been, in this respect at least, abnormal. For my affection for Bates, whose insolence, sycophancy and drunkenness made him detested by the whole family except my grandfather, was deep and boundless. Ruddy-complexioned, fair-moustached and, as I now realise, distressingly familiar, he continued to tyrannise over the whole household until one fatal day in 1914 when, heavily in liquor, he went too far in the presence of the son of the house returned from the Front who knocked him for six across the stable-yard. But fortunately his failings were as hidden from me as was his fate, when perched beside him on the driving seat I was borne at what seemed an unbelievable speed past the flying hedgerows up the dusty hill which led out of the town.

The gate-pillars of S——, my grandfather's residence, were also globe-topped, but this was the only thing which they had in common with those of Eastwinch Hall. Whereas the latter were,

<sup>1</sup> 'The Ungrateful Heart' in *The Cornhill* (Summer No. 1951).

perhaps, over-prominent in view of the almost suburban drive on to which they gave, the former, half concealed by trees and shrubs, hardly suggested the long winding carriageway leading from the small Gothic lodge across the fields and finally disappearing over the hill behind a distant clump of trees. The house itself was not remarkable architecturally and exists in my memory solely as a medium-sized confusion of ivy, gables and white barge boards, but the gardens established for ever an ideal to which none subsequently encountered have ever attained. My grandfather was a skilled and enthusiastic gardener but in the style of Loudon rather than Miss Jekyll; here were none of those messy herbaceous borders and vulgar 'riots of colour' which make so many modern gardens look like the worst sort of Christmas Calendar, but terraced lawns and geometrical flower-beds symmetrically placed, their harvest of geraniums and lobelias protected by a ring of little wrought-iron hoops. Here was no crazy-paving overgrown with monstrous delphiniums stretching between sun-dial and bird-bath, but winding gravel paths arched by trellises leading to rustic summerhouses across wooden footbridges spanning contrived, fern-shaded waterfalls. And the boundary was not marked by some crumbling brick wall untidy with rock-plants but by a ha-ha neatly stretched between balancing clumps of rare coniferous trees allowing a clear view across the fields to the home-farm.

The neatness and order so evident in the garden were not, curiously enough, reflected in the way of life prevailing indoors. On looking back, existence at S— has taken on rather a Tchekov flavour, but this may perhaps be due in part to art. It so happened that all my visits there in childhood seem to have been blessed with weather of exceptional heat and brightness, which led, my grandfather being markedly photophobic, to the green venetian blinds being almost permanently down. This produced that filtered sub-aqueous light which, those who are old enough to remember the earliest Komisajevsky productions of Tchekov will recall, invariably flooded the country house interiors of theatrical Russia. Nevertheless, this coincidence seems to me to have reinforced rather than induced an impression which owed its origin to a certain inconsequence and lack of decision on the part of the family cast.

In strong contrast to life at Eastwinch, governed by Median rules, where no expedition or enterprise outside the normal routine was ever embarked on without the maximum planning, rigidly adhered to, at S— plans were only made in order to be changed,



and the whole rhythm of everyday existence was liable to be completely upset for the merest whim. Moreover while in Norfolk ill-health, anyhow in anyone under seventy, was regarded as a sign of weakness and rigorously discouraged, in Dorset no day passed without some member of the family being laid low with a migraine or a *crise de nerfs*. This was the least easily overlooked in the case of my grandfather himself for whom the stoic fortitude on which the Lancasters set so great a store made no appeal, and who saw little point in suffering if it were to be concealed and not to be shared with the largest number possible. Thus on such days as he was attacked by one of his 'heads' the whole life of the household was completely overturned. The utmost quiet was insisted on and everyone went on tip-toe, which naturally reinforced the lugubrious effect created by the groans and bellows coming from behind his bedroom door. Within, no matter how hot the day, all the windows were tight closed, the blinds drawn and a roaring fire blazed in the grate, a condition of affairs which inevitably increased the casualty list as my grandfather could not be left alone and some member of the family had always to sit at his bedside. Even for those not so called, life was sufficiently disrupted; for, although the domestic staff was large, the constant supply of light meals on trays, most of which the invalid promptly sent back to the cook with a few acid comments and fresh instructions, the dispatch of numerous contradictory telegrams to Harley Street, all of which had to be taken by groom or chauffeur five miles to the nearest post-office, in addition to the condition of hopeless hysteria to which my grandfather sooner or later succeeded in reducing at least one of the housemaids, taxed its resources to the utmost. But while always remaining the principal sufferer, in comparison with whose agonies those of others were as nothing, my grandfather seldom remained the sole invalid for long. His second wife, although subservient to her lord in all things, was a martyr to ill-health, in part genuinely so, and her children, my mother's step-sisters, had inherited from their parents the liability to take to their beds at the drop of a hat. Thus it frequently happened that I and my mother found ourselves alone for days on end, save perhaps for an uncle on vacation from Oxford or on leave from his regiment who were made of rather tougher stuff than the rest of the family.

Normally when good health was general the whole household assembled, as at Eastwinch, for the first time at family prayers, the only difference being that here absenteeism was more frequent, and

less censured. The dining-room was a spacious apartment decorated in what I have always considered the appropriate style—crimson flock wallpaper, steel engravings after Gustave Doré, and a massive side-board on which, together with the Chinoiserie racing-trophies, there rested at this hour a whole battery of silver dishes from which arose a gentle steam to mingle with the souls of the righteous who were being conveyed, immediately above, by a flock of angels from the moon-lit Coliseum where their earthly bodies were still being ruminatively chewed by lions. The length of the religious ceremony which preceded our own meal depended largely on whether my grandfather himself was conducting it and if so on the state of his appetite. If he had arisen brisk and early, eagerly appreciative of the whiff of fried bacon, our devotions would be carried out at breakneck speed; if, on the other hand, his night had been disturbed and he was convinced, as he frequently was, that his enfeebled health could hardly hold out much longer, the ceremony would be prolonged by the addition of a selected passage of Holy Writ read in a suitably lugubrious tone. When, as very frequently happened, the reading was taken from that passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians where the Apostle stresses the importance of submission to temporal authority the effect was immensely impressive. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands"—pause during which my grandfather's light blue eye would rest rather sorrowfully on my grandmother "... children, obey your parents"—up would go the monocle and a stern glance would fall on my aunts and uncles "... Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters"—and it was transferred vengefully upon the ranged rows of the domestic staff. Curiously enough, on these occasions the verses in which the writer goes on to outline the obligations of the head of the household were invariably omitted.

Thus spiritually purged we all sat down to an enormous and excellent breakfast which would usually pass pleasantly enough in the discussion of plans for the day which lost nothing in excitement from the knowledge that they would almost certainly not be carried out. The only interruption likely to occur was if the bacon did not attain the exact degree of crispness insisted on by my grandfather, in which case this mood of Christian resignation would vanish in a flash, and the butler would receive a brisk message for the cook, to whom, incidentally, he was married, couched in decidedly more forceful terms than those employed by St. Paul.

For me the rest of the day passed in a series of delicious, unorgan-

ised pleasures. No one sent me on little errands ; my presence was not demanded on the tennis-lawn ; I was at full liberty to take what books I liked from my grandfather's library. I could spend the morning in the stable with Hodder, the groom, a splendid primeval rustic figure who had never been further than Shaftesbury in his life, or wander unshepherded along the stream in the wood, or reconstruct the battle of Tsushima with a wooden model of the Japanese fleet, belonging to an uncle still at Wellington, in the water-tank in the kitchen garden. No one bothered me until it was time for one of the large meals which punctuated the day, and here these too were sources of keen pleasure and eager anticipation ; for, unlike the Lancasters, my maternal relatives were far from indifferent to what they ate and the simple country fare provided by the home-farm was reinforced by a regular supply of more exotic dainties sent down from Jacksons. All of which forces the conclusion that, on the whole, children are likely to have a far better time where the adults are reasonably self-centred.

While the enlightened self-interest, which was the guiding principle of my grandfather's life, operated happily enough in my own case, it must be confessed it showed him in rather less admirable light when dealing with other relatives. Unlike his opposite number he entertained no very exalted conception of family obligations and, apart from his own children, his affection for his relations was at its warmest when they were furthest removed, and this was particularly so in the case of his elder sister, my great-aunt A. Left to himself, it seems likely that this remarkable old lady's visits to S—— would have been even more spaced out than they were, but fortunately my mother, aided by her step-sister, was at hand to see that he did not shirk his obligations.

It must be admitted that his reluctance to entertain his sister, although undoubtedly blame-worthy, was not altogether incomprehensible. Great-aunt A was certainly, in some ways, a problem. Unmarried, her emotional life had been a series of disappointments, none the less bitter for the fact that they had been, when not wholly imaginary, largely her own fault. Her girlhood had coincided with that peculiarly sentimental period, the mid-seventies, when clad in an art-silk bustle she had studied water-colour painting at South Kensington and lost her heart to innumerable curates. As time went on and one dog-collar after another slipped through her fingers she found a certain compensation in the extraordinary number of disagreeable encounters and

impertinent suggestions to which her beauty, so she was convinced, subjected her, and abandoned painting in favour of cultivating the more socially useful gift of a magnificent *coloratura* soprano. However, despite her blighted youth she looked forward to a dignified old age when, as she would frequently announce, she intended to put on a neat little mob-cap with lace tippets and a plain but rich watered silk dress. As at the time of her visits to S—— she was invariably dressed in flowered muslins of the most youthful cut and girlish straw hats heavily over-laden with cabbage roses and was known to be close on seventy, it was not exactly clear as to when she expected the final stage of her earthly pilgrimage to begin.

My grandfather's attitude towards his sister, disgraceful as it was, was founded on a very clear-sighted appreciation of the exact nature of the caste system as it prevailed in the English countryside in the Edwardian period, and of his own position in the local hierarchy. Thanks to an engaging presence, thirty years' residence, and a stable full of hunters he was at long last established as being of 'the county' and sat on the local Bench and visited, and was visited by, all the neighbouring landowners. Nevertheless, he fully realised that there were still subtle distinctions within the closed circle into which he had been at such pains to enter, and whereas the local baronet, whose family had been resident in the neighbourhood for generations, could easily afford the presence beneath his roof of any number of the most wildly eccentric female relations, unfavourable comment was only too likely to be aroused by any too great prominence attaching to the mildly ridiculous elder sister of a retired China merchant. Dottiness, to be socially profitable, had still to have at least four or five generations of inbreeding behind it.

Thus, during the period of great-aunt A's visit there was always a marked reduction in the number of little luncheon-parties for the local gentry and my grandfather's health would seldom permit his attendance at church on Sunday. In the latter instance his lack of moral fibre was, perhaps, forgivable, for even those with nerves of iron might well be shaken on finding themselves in the close proximity of great-aunt A at Divine Service. For not only did that indomitable old lady always on these occasions take particular pains with her dress which led to the most fantastic superfluity of large pale blue bows, dangling ear-rings and enormous brooches strategically placed, but invariably made the most of the opportunity afforded for the fullest exercise of her remarkable voice. All was moderately well so long as she sang in unison; gradually almost

complete silence would fall on the neighbouring pews as they realised the uselessness of competition, and one or two of the more impressionable choir-boys would collapse in hysterics, though a semblance of harmony was maintained ; but once she started to sing seconds, as sooner or later she invariably did, all hope was lost and the organist could do nothing but immediately switch to *ff.* and put on what speed he could, hoping for the best. Then it was that the more stalwart members of the family thought enviously of its head, comfortably tucked up in bed reading Meredith, and wondered whether or not their own display of unflinching loyalty had really been worth it.

In addition to her vocal enthusiasm and bizarre taste in dress, great-aunt A brought with her another cause of disruption. Like many maiden ladies living alone her affection for her domestic pets had long since passed way beyond the limits of normality, and all the passion which the curates had so unthinkingly rejected was now directed on her canary and her Pekinese. The former, whose vocal range was even more piercingly extended than great-aunt A's own, was fortunately left behind, together with endless instructions and ample supplies of groundsel, with the landlady (to whom numerous admonitory post-cards on the subject of fresh water and cage-cleaning would regularly be dispatched) but the latter invariably accompanied his mistress on all her travels. Even by Pekinese standards, which in my experience are exalted, Mr. Wu rated as a menace of the highest order. Ostentatiously conscious of his aristocratic breeding, like so many of the bluest blood, he made no effort to conceal his arrogance and selfishness, and regarded it as completely absolving him from all effort to conform to the usages of decent canine society. House training was only for the middle-classes and he constantly dirtied carpets and chintz with all the insouciance of Louis XIV relieving himself in the open fireplace at Versailles. In addition he gloried in the possession of a delicate digestion and not only insisted on the most tender meals but threw up his dinner with an uninhibited frequency when and where he chose. His temper was as uncontrolled as his personal habits and despite the aristocratic flatness of his features he was perfectly capable of producing a nasty flesh wound at ankle level. In no house, therefore, was Mr. Wu a welcome guest, but at my grandfather's his presence always proved more than usually disruptive, as here, for probably the only times in his life, he encountered stiff opposition.

S—, like so many houses wherein all summer-long there



#### THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER

reigns a thwarted restlessness due to the fact that for the majority of the inhabitants life only begins with the hunting season, was heavily over-dogged, as if a constant yapping and baying, faint echoes of the glorious music of the winter-months, was absolutely necessary to maintain vitality during a period insufficiently enlivened by tennis parties: and despite the constant protests of my grandfather, who was no friend to the lower orders of creation and for whom the hunting field had a purely social justification, vast hordes of his offsprings' pets constantly roamed the whole place. In the case of my Uncle Jack's spaniels, Budge and Toddy, as kindly and affectionate as their master, the rule barring entry to the house itself was fairly strictly observed; with the fox-terrier Jacky who had developed a mania for snapping off the heads of chickens, (and great speed and skill, for I well remember the surrealist



spectacle of several headless birds all running round the farm-yard at once,) a certain feeling of relief was induced by his presence indoors; but over my youngest aunt's kennel no control had ever been effectively achieved. This last usually consisted of at least half a dozen Sealyhams, of unbounded energy and considerable ferocity, and a couple of Irish wolf-hounds, friendly and amiable enough, but one friendly wag of whose tails was capable of obliterating a whole regiment of netsukés and any quantity of Satsuma ware. Thus life was constantly being enlivened by a series of appalling scenes between parents and children and brothers and sisters arising from vain attempts to establish the exact responsibility for the latest canine misdemeanour. Sometimes, as when half-way through a smart little luncheon party at which my grandfather was entertaining an important local magnate all the cream for the strawberries was discovered to have been devoured by Jacky,

these reached epic proportions and went rumbling on for years. On other occasions, such as when the new curate paying his first call had been brought down on the drawing-room carpet by the whole pack of Sealyhams in full cry and rescued only just in the nick of time, the incident passed off in peals of happy laughter and soon became a favourite subject for joyous reminiscence. With the arrival of Mr. Wu the incidence of such disasters not only immensely increased, but owing to great-aunt A's almost insane affection for her repellent hound, left a trail of much intensified bitterness behind them. And it was to a disaster thus brought about that I owed my earliest acquaintance with one of the fundamental, and least agreeable, facts of life.

The garden at S— had been laid out on a slight incline, the ground falling away from the highest point outside the drawing-room windows to the ha-ha which marked the boundary of the level fields, and in order to accommodate both a croquet-lawn and a tennis court two fairly steep cuttings had been made so that the terrace was separated from the tennis and the tennis from the croquet by neatly turfed embankments of considerable height and steepness. One fine morning I was pleasantly engaged in rolling down the upper and steeper of these two ramps—an occupation to which I had devoted much practice and in which, while giving a gratifying illusion of distress to uninformed witnesses, I was able to indulge with no hurt or inconvenience to myself—in the indulgent charge of great-aunt A who was reading *Home Chat* in a deckchair on the terrace. Alongside her was Mr. Wu, slobbering over a disgusting rubber ball, who had only been allowed to expose himself to the perils of the outer world on the strict understanding that all the various gates and doors which gave access from this part of the garden to the stable yard, to which the rest of the canine population had been banished, were securely locked. Quite suddenly, the desultory barking which formed an almost continuous ground-bass to the confused melody of our daily life became much louder and more purposeful and almost before I or great-aunt A had fully registered this fact, the whole pack of Sealyhams came skidding round the geraniums in full cry. The reason for their sudden appearance was not for a second in doubt to any of us, least of all Mr. Wu, whose fully justified fears of a jacquerie he at last saw terrifyingly realised. With one bound he was on his mistress' lap only to be immediately snatched up by my terrified aunt and clasped tight to her shoulder as far out of the aggressors' range

#### THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER

as possible. They, however, quite obviously meant business ; their views of the mandarin-class coincided exactly with those of Sun-Yat-Sen and they were clearly in no doubt at all as to who was the cause of their enforced seclusion of the last few days. Realising, after a few abortive leaps, that their predestined victim was out of reach, they changed their tactics and concentrated on getting his protectress down. I, meanwhile seeing that the Sealyhams, of whom I entertained a healthy and not unjustified dread, were at the moment quite single minded, gave myself up to a fascinated contemplation of great-aunt A in the lead-role of ' Fireman save my child,' from which her frenzied shrieks of " Osbert don't just sit there ! *Do Something !* " quite failed to rouse me. The end was inevitable and terrifying ; my great-aunt, her tartan skirt already loosened from its moorings, still clutching her darling whose aristocratic calm had for once I was happy to observe quite deserted him, backed steadily towards the edge of the terrace. One moment she was aloft and upright, assailed, frightened but still dominant—the next she was



falling helpless through the air to land backwards on the croquet lawn only a split second before the whole pack had galloped down the incline on top of her. At the exact moment that she lost her balance a shocking truth was suddenly made apparent to me; that grown-ups, whom I had always regarded as exempt from falling-down and hurting themselves, were as liable to physical mishaps as children, and that being grown-up did not automatically give one complete and certain control over all events whatsoever. Then the fear so clearly discernible in the eyes of poor Aunt A aroused an echo in my own heart, chilly and far-reaching.

Fortunately, and in view of her age surprisingly, the terrifying situation into which great-aunt A had fallen and from which she was quickly rescued by the arrival of gardeners and aunts, had no serious consequences. . . .

For all her apparent frailty and constantly advertised ill-health she was a woman of the utmost toughness. She continued to live her solitary life in a succession of depressing 'rooms' in the backstreets of Putney of which her tenancy invariably came to an end with a major row with the landlady whom on first acquaintance she had always found to be a pearl beyond price ("Really a *lady* dear,—she treats me more as a friend than a lodger!") but who always turned out, after a period ranging from three months to a year, to be "odiously familiar." As the years went by her income from the minute capital left her by her father grew less and less, but all offers of help were indignantly repulsed with the explanation "I have never accepted charity, dear, and I never will." The day when she was to relapse gracefully into old age, all mob-caps and lace, seemed to be indefinitely postponed and she followed the changing fashions as best she could with the aid of the patterns on the woman's page of her daily paper and "such a clever little woman round the corner." This proved particularly embarrassing in the mid 'twenties when she was nearing eighty, and her relations were only too thankful that her brother did not survive to see her in cloche hat and short skirts judging, probably correctly, that even the small sum which she inherited under his will would in that case have been forfeited. Strikes, revolutions, wars in no way affected her modest way of life, and indeed the most recent conflict had, if anything, an invigorating effect. Seldom do I recall her so gay as immediately after a fire-bomb had come through her ceiling and she had been assisted in her night attire to less exposed

quarters by the local fire brigade. Finally, after such rejuvenating experiences as travelling alone from Crewe to London in a war-time guard's-van in her ninety-first year, she was carried off, well on in her tenth decade, by the sharp winter of '46-'47.

For long years I had been accustomed to consider great-aunt A solely as a joke, and one moreover which could, thanks to her insane pride and invincible touchiness, pall, but at the end her very foolishness took on a monumental, and indeed almost admirable, quality. When, after her ride in the guard's-van she confided that she had been really rather alarmed by the presence of a young soldier (such a good looking boy, too!) who looked at her in a most *peculiar* way and was quite thankful that there was rather a crowd, laughter was stilled by wonder. Illusions, no matter how ridiculous, so tenaciously clung to are in their way monuments to the inextinguishable vitality of the human heart.

Born almost in the shadow of the Great Exhibition and coming to maturity in what was probably the silliest of all decades in the history of female sensibility, great-aunt A, foolish, inhibited, invincibly coy and hopelessly maladjusted by the standards of modern psychology, completely unfitted ever to earn a pennypiece and never, even in her palmiest days, enjoying an independent income of more than a hundred and fifty a year, yet managed to preserve a perhaps ridiculous but genuine integrity from Sedan, which had delayed her finishing her education in Paris, to the 'Blitz' in which she took so keen and personal an interest. The flame with which she burnt may never have been hard nor gem-like but it cast a constant if unsteady light.

All too soon our visit would come to an end. One day a complicated timetable would be worked out in which my grandfather's visit to the dentist in Bath could conveniently be combined with our catching the fast train to London, readjusted to allow of my aunt's taking one of the Sealyhams to the vet in Wincanton, a picnic *en route* substituted for luncheon at the Grand Pump Room Hotel, and finally abandoned entirely amidst a storm of argument and counter-suggestions. In due course the car would come round to take us to G—— station as usual and I would be led up to take leave of my grandfather, trying hard not to look expectant but always nevertheless relieved on hearing the faint crackle of a fiver as my hand was warmly shaken, provoking profuse thanks from me and distressed cries of "Really, Father, you shouldn't!



OSBERT LANCASTER

It's far too much!" from my mother, and, I am deeply ashamed to say, in the depths of my heart scornful reflections on my grandfather Lancaster who on such occasions (which I did not pause to consider were in his case far more numerous) seldom rose to more than half a sovereign.

In the homeward train I was always a prey to the deepest gloom from which neither the latest *Rainbow* nor the arrival of the luncheon basket with the inevitable leg of L.S.W.R. chicken, strangely blue in colour, could rouse me. No more long afternoons reading Kenneth Grahame in the hammock, no more ponies, no more young and indulgent aunts and uncles, no more making myself sick on lemonade in the butler's pantry,—even the prospect of once more seeing Kate could not compensate for all I was losing. At last I could bear it no longer and would angrily demand in a voice not far from tears why, when I was so happy, did we have to come away? Gentle but firm the answer was always the same, "Osbert dear, you are old enough now to realise that we are not put into this world just to be happy."



## Jean Cocteau : *The Frivolous Prince*

BY GEOFFREY WAGNER

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COCTEAU, who has built up a name for himself as one of the most vibrant and theatrical personalities of modern literature, belongs indeed to the fertile French tradition of '*épater le bourgeois*.' His is essentially a spirit in revolt, a *bousingot* of the 1830's who would have had much in common with the eccentrics of that era, with Jean du Seigneur who used to brush up his hair into twin peaks in order to simulate the flames of genius, with Théophile Dondey who wore glasses in his sleep so that he might see his dreams, or with Gérard de Nerval who took a wigwam with him whenever invited away for the weekend and set it up on the guest-room floor, and who, in the last, tragic days of his life, used to parade through the *jardins du Luxembourg* with a lobster on a pale blue ribbon and, when asked why, replied that it alone knew the secrets of the deep (he later hung himself from a lamp-post in the twisting rue de la vieille lanterne with a piece of string which he had insisted was the Queen of Sheba's garter). It is to this tradition, an essentially Parisian one moreover, that Cocteau belongs : '*Je suis né Parisien, je parle Parisien, je prononce Parisien*,' he has said.

Of course it is true that Americans too witnessed a brief but brilliant reflection of this æsthetic eccentricism in the 1920's, and were blessed for a while with such Greenwich Village bohemians as the celebrated Baroness Elsa von Freytag von Loringhoven, who terrified the editors of *The Little Review* with her green hair and face pasted over with postage stamps, or her shaven head lacquered with vermilion ; but the genre is essentially Paris vintage 1830, and even Hart Crane refrained from tattooing his face with Indian ink and dancing the Gasotski until he had reached that citadel of culture, whilst Oscar Wilde reserved some of his most trenchant sallies for France, including those two famous, albeit pathetic, epigrams on his deathbed, 'We are dying beyond our means' and 'Either this wallpaper or I must go.'

Cocteau has thus continued, as it were, Corbière's famous walk through Rome with a pig, a gesture of defiance against existent

order, characteristic of that attempt to speed-up the outbreak of scandal which alone, in a world of sham, can constitute authenticity for the artist. Cocteau and his contemporaries came of literary age in and after the first world war, and a distrust of authority characterised the literature and painting of that time; for what, asked the young men, had authority or reason brought to their world but catastrophe? They distrusted their elders and at the same time held in their young hands ideological weapons of great power. They had seen man explode his society, both from within and from without, and their ideas of 'free' art, derived from Baudelaire and practised most faithfully, if least fruitfully perhaps, by Lautréamont and Jarry, had gained immense impetus from amongst others, the work of Freud. Apollinaire was dashing off his verses on matchboxes, Picasso scrawling his charming early sketches on café napkins, Picabia rushing across the *côte d'azur* in his racing car in between doctoring on his yacht, Aragon writing his poem *Suicide*, consisting solely of the letters of the alphabet, and Tristan Tzara wearing two monocles. The first Dada demonstrations began in France in 1920 and Breton's first manifesto of surrealism (though Apollinaire had used the word in his Preface to *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* in 1917) appeared in 1924. But, as with *Hernani*, the revolt of the period was an act of faith. Such it has always been for Jean Cocteau. Revolt for him is dialectic, and the famous remark made, with less aptitude of Baudelaire, might well be applied to Cocteau—that he undoubtedly sleeps under his bed, rather than on top of it, just in order to shock it. '*Ils ne savent par quel bout me prendre*,' Cocteau has written in *La Difficulté d'Etre*, one of his most interesting autobiographical and critical volumes, but one can trace a definite strain of convention in the most histrionic of his gestures, and that is the love of liberty. Such has given his work its poignance and such, together with his effervescent intellectual curiosity and insistence on feeling forward in art, make its appeal more and more attractive today. His sharp sense of cinema is, for instance, reinforced today by the acceptance of techniques and methods in this medium which he was exploring more than twenty years ago.

Though he has always been somewhat *coquet* about his age Cocteau was, in fact, born at Maisons-Laffitte on July 5th, 1889. His childhood and adolescence were typically middle-class, assured and uneventful. He studied at Condorcet, which he claims he hated, but which must have furnished him nevertheless with part

#### JEAN COCTEAU: THE FRIVOLOUS PRINCE

of his private mythology for so many of his books either concern this kind of *lycée* life or deal with problems of adolescence, though this was not uncommon in France in the twenties (between 1920 and 1930 at least sixty major French novels of adolescence were written). He travelled through Europe with his mother and at the theatre watched Sarah Bernhardt and Edouard Max, but above all it must have been his visits to the circus that fascinated the young Cocteau, for the circus, and its symbolism, has always had a powerful influence on his imagination and is a clue to many of his stage effects. He acknowledged his debt to the circus in a Prologue, which he later disowned, to his play *Orphée* in 1926, and one remembers too, what it meant to Picasso at this time, just as, recently, it has begun to mean much to an American painter, Ben Shahn.

Cocteau's youth, then, was, like Proust's, free from financial embarrassment and his enemies even say that a tinge of '*enfant gâté*' has always coloured his work. His first literary loyalties were marked by his contact with such men as Jules Lemaître, Proust (a tender epistle from whom can be seen in facsimile in a recent book on Cocteau called *Jean Cocteau, Inédits*, Paris, P.S., 1950), Catulle-Mendès and Edmond Rostand, author of the famous *Cyrano*, sometimes called Victor Hugo's greatest work, and the dictator of taste in certain departments of French letters at that time; Gide's *Journal* enters an anecdote of the Rostand of this period that summarises well his latter public appearances—of how having finally exasperated his dinner companions by playing the great man to waiters and others, he burnt a hole in the tablecloth, thus causing Lemaître to exclaim '*Il ne faut que signer le trou.*'

At sixteen, installed in the old-fashioned and abandoned Hotel Biron, Cocteau published his first book of poetry, *La Lampe d'Aladin*, and shortly afterwards, under the imprint of the Mercure de France, two more collections of his appeared, *Le Prince Frivole* and *La Danse de Sophocle*; all these three works have since been excised by Cocteau from his bibliography and make rare items on the book-market today. But this attempt to excommunicate his adolescence was not merely an act of the older man; in 1913, after a serious study of his work had come out by André Gide and Henri Ghéon in their *Nouvelle Revue Française*, and the perspicacious advice of Serge de Diaghilew—'*Etonne-moi!*'—had been given him, there came a crisis in Cocteau's life which proved its turning-point. He went home and drew his aim at the world again. This time he

found himself, there is no doubt; and from now on his abundant creative gift poured itself into those channels for which it was most fitted. For Cocteau has seldom wasted his talent in unfruitful production (such as trying to write in the school of modern French realism, for example, like Sartre); rather he has cleverly capitalised his gift of being able to sublimate very directly into poetry, and his flair for metamorphosing the intellect into an almost irresistible element in affairs. *Le Potomak*, written alongside Gide and Strawinsky, was the first result of this new direction in Cocteau's life and, though it belongs to the rich tradition of French confessional literature, being a kind of interior inquisition, it shows for the first time Cocteau's love of the theatre. An operatic atmosphere and a sensation of luxury, plus a rapid exchange between artifice and reality, these are visible in *Le Potomak* and, when mastered, they become the hallmarks of Cocteau's genius. Luxury takes on with Cocteau a real intellectual quality. It was the love of it that drew him to such people as the Comte Etienne de Beaumont, with his wonderful parties in Paris before the war, to Chanel, the Polignacs and Bérard; so, addressing the Americans in his *Lettre aux Américains*, Cocteau has this to say about luxury:

*Le luxe est une vertu noble qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec le confort. Vous avez le confort. Il vous manque le luxe. Et ne me dites pas que la monnaie y joue un rôle. Le luxe que je préconise n'a rien à voir avec l'argent. Il ne s'achète pas. Il est la récompense de ceux qui ne redoutent pas l'inconfort. Il nous engage vis-à-vis de nous-mêmes. Il est la pâture de l'âme.*

There is visible in the early *Le Potomak*, too, another paradoxical trait which will recur constantly in Cocteau, namely the idea of poet as machine. 'Me voilà quelque chose de tout à fait machine,' he says in his work and he means it in the sense of the poet being a detector, as it were, of reality (Baudelaire had called him a 'déchiffreur' whereas Proust called the artist a 'traducteur'). His equipment was his ultra-sensibility to those traces of the spiritual world left on earth, and so in the film of *Orphée*, which had such wide international success, we see the protagonist catching the words of the dead poet, Cégeste, through a mechanical apparatus, a car radio. Again, when Cocteau chose to write his *Oedipus* play, he called it *La Machine Infernale* because violent passions tend to take the rôle in our lives of heartless machines. Finally, at this time, the famous Salon des Indépendants, boasting canvases by



Picasso, Braque, and *le douanier* Rousseau, attracted Cocteau to painting, and led him to investigate that particularly sensitive kind of linear draughtsmanship which he has made his own, and the first examples of which he signed with the name of his dog, Jim. When the 1914 war came Cocteau joined up, but did not remain in uniform long; it was long enough, however, for him to gain experiences for his poems in *Discours du Grand Sommeil* and to meet a young impostor who called himself Thomas de Castelneau and claimed authority from his 'uncle,' the General. This episode tickled Cocteau's fancy and he made of it his novel *Thomas L'Imposteur*, one of his most readable for an English audience and one of his most endearing, too, since it is close to our own physical experience. The scene where the soldier smokes his last cigarette before submitting his leg to the agony of amputation without anæsthetic, only to have a shell fall on the building and to be left to die slowly of gangrene, is one of the most vivid in Cocteau's prose.

He was back in Paris in 1916, produced a collection of poems called *Cap de Bonne Espérance* with many strange typographical innovations that doubtless owed somewhat to Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, and from now on he became heavily involved in the theatre. Together with Picasso, with whom he became more and more friendly, and to whom we are indebted for a portrait of this period, he worked on the Diaghilew ballet, *Parade*, that proved such a scandal in Rome in 1917 and caused Cocteau to exclaim, '*Je ne devais plus connaître que des scandales.*' Back in Paris he became associated with such names as André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Jean Paulhan, Robert Desnos and Tristan Tzara, and in June 1921 put on his magnificent, if dated, satire of French middle-class life called *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* at the théâtre des Champs-Élysées. This play, or rather mime, since the text is mainly spoken by two men dressed up as gramophones, undoubtedly owed to the fantastic *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* of Apollinaire, produced in 1918, a preposterous sort of repopulation myth (a father produces children out of old newspapers, a mother's breasts expand and sail through the air in the form of balloons), built up of a series of puns, tricks and *jeux de mots*; but it made Cocteau's name in the French theatre. In any case it was an exciting period there, the era of the great *metteurs-en-scène* like Copeau, Baty, Jouvet, Dullin and Pitoëff (with all of whom Cocteau was to be intimately associated), a time of such experiment, in fact, that Alfred Capus' anticipation

of it in 1913, called *Institut de Beauté*, hardly exaggerated when a theatrical producer comes on to the stage and boasts of his startling innovation in actually having a curtain between his actor and the audience (in this connection one remembers another such exaggeration in the cult of 'nudisme' in poetry when Orphée at the beginning of the film is handed the latest book of poetry consisting of blank pages).

Certainly for Cocteau this *ballet divertissement* founded many of his later friendships in the theatre for there were masks by Jean Victor-Hugo and music by (amongst others) Auric who was never to leave Cocteau, writing the musical scores for his best-known films, such as *l'Eternel Retour*, *La Belle et la Bête* and *Orphée*. After this there came *Bœuf sur le toit*, a mime at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées (with Louis Jouvet as Director and masks by Dufy), and the subsequent founding of Cocteau's celebrated night-club in the rue Huyghens where not only could patrons see the latest fashions but could also hear poems by men like Pierre Reverdy, Max Jacob and Cocteau. This was the period, too, of Cocteau's brief but profound friendship with Raymond Radiguet, the precocious author of *Le Diable au Corps* and the only one of these literati who was actually younger than Cocteau.

Volumes of his poetry continued to appear, including a group called *Vocabulaire* in 1922, and another, later, *Plain Chant*, which shows an advance in discipline and has the rather typical central themes of the sea, infancy and sexual love. One other aspect of Cocteau's poetry, which is clearly echoed in his other work, has been called by Roger Lannes, in a recent study, 'angélisme.' Now in each of Hermann Hesse's interesting novels, *Demian* (1919) and *Siddharta* (1923), a character is split into halves, angel and demon, the one continually working against the other; some of Cocteau's characters share this split, though it is usually eventuated into, and personified by, other characters who became thus emanations of the hero's own personality. The angel-type in this arrangement, as in Rilke's poem *Der Schutzengel*, is the link, the intermediary between man and God. Cocteau's play *Orphée*, which was produced by Pitoëff at the Théâtre des Arts in 1926, contains this theme in the guise of Heurtebise who appears also in a longish poem of lament called *l'Ange Heurtebise*, collected in *Opéra*. As in the film Cocteau was to make so many years later, Heurtebise here provides the connecting link between the two worlds, he is the one who is able to pierce mirrors like water, as he says in this play, thus

#### JEAN COCTEAU: THE FRIVOLOUS PRINCE

suggesting that water-like rippling of the mirror we have in the film and which is so evocative of that moment of agony that such a transition must be. It is typical Cocteau, therefore, when we remember what he feels about the poet as machine, when we realise that Heurtebise is the name of a famous elevator company in France and that, in the play of *Orphée*, we meet him—a glazier with his panes of glass in a rack around him—suddenly suspended in the air when Orphée takes his chair away from under him, for Heurtebise has the divine properties of elevation. Cocteau loves this sort of symbolism, himself took the part of Heurtebise at one time and has had trick levitational photographs of himself taken, in one of which he appears suspended on the wall over an elegant marble fireplace in the act of bending over the loins of a slender but heavily bejewelled adolescent girl.

Cocteau's theatrical successes have continued, from time to time, and include an *Antigone*, first put on by Dullin with Chanel costumes and revived with the other, new Antigones of Marcel Brillan, and later of Anouilh, during the occupation, *La Machine Infernale*; his Œdipus legend which bears resemblance in its Jocasta to Isadora Duncan and her tragic death caused by a scarf when driving in the south of France; *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde*, a mystical comedy of the Round Table produced with great elegance in Chanel costumes at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1937 and starring Jean Marais, who from now on becomes Cocteau's unfailing *jeune premier*; and *L'Aigle à Deux Têtes*, a melodramatic piece with Marais as an anarchist who falls in love with the Queen whom he is to kill. But despite such incidentals as a talking flower in *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde*, and other properties in *Renaud et Armide* and *Les Parents Terribles*, Cocteau's theatre becomes progressively less surrealist after *Orphée*. *La Voix Humaine*, for instance, presented at the Comédie Française in 1930 to a decor by Bérard, discloses as the curtain goes up a woman, abandoned by her lover, lying 'comme assassinée' on her bed, and proves to be no more than a one-Act telephone conversation; *L'Aigle à Deux Têtes* belongs to the classical tradition of French drama, relying less on action and effects than on beauty of language. *Orphée*, however, later so creatively translated to the screen, is full of surreal titbits, opening with a Prologue from Cocteau warning the audience that Death is in the house; Death herself, when she comes in, borrows a watch from 'a member of the audience,' and when the decapitated head of the poet is thrown on to the stage, it is placed on a pedestal by Heurtebise and

talks (rather like the live caryatida in the film *La Belle et la Bête*)—so, when asked its identity by a police officer, it replies 'Jean Cocteau.' One scene is replayed twice, each time exactly the same, on the stage.

But although Cocteau's theatre has become rather more conventional his work in the cinema has, of course, taken the reverse direction. Though *La Belle et la Bête* was repetitive and uninspired in this way, most critics felt that *Orphée* marked a great step forward and knit its surreal elements into the theme in a new kind of filmic poetry. In his prose work, too, Cocteau was also less conventional. *Le Grand Écart* is a small, circumscribed, but nevertheless anguishing study of adolescence; in many ways the children of this book, as of *Les Enfants Terribles* (both novel and play), are horrifyingly adult, even cynical, but essentially they are marked by their phase of life, and in the former work Jacques Forestier's abortive suicide, when he thinks his girl, Germaine, is unfaithful to him, is most touching. Both books are, however, well outside the Anglo Saxon tradition of the novel, both present circles so charmed that there is almost no contact at all with outside society, and through both run threads of incest and homosexuality. For Cocteau had now begun an unhappy period in his life; during a visit to Monte-Carlo he was introduced to the habit of opium, under the influence of which he knew great suffering and went to the brink of religious conversion. His book, *Opium*, subtitled *Journal d'Une Désintoxication*, and published in 1930, does not really reflect this spiritual pilgrimage; it contains some noble maxims on art and life in general and some typically penetrating aphorisms on men of letters, such as Proust, Nerval, Rimbaud, Ducasse and de Sade. It is illustrated by some remarkable drawings which convey far more than the text the sense of horror and of damnation that follow self-gratification for the sensitive spirit. But it is from now on that Cocteau seriously interested himself in the cinema and one cannot help reflecting that the contact with the wide audience of this medium possibly helped to rescue him from a morbid and negative development; for his genius was made to be communicated—'J'aime les autres,' he has written, 'et n'existe que par eux. Sans eux mes balles sont perdues. Sans eux ma flamme baisse. Sans eux je suis fantôme.'

Consequently the making of his first film *Le Sang d'un Poète* was a fortunate moment in the history of the cinema and of Cocteau's own life. It contains many elements which were violently revolutionary at the time but which he has since often exploited and which

#### JEAN COCTEAU: THE FRIVOLOUS PRINCE

have been found so acceptable in his latest work—a talking mouth in the hand of the hero, a dive into a mirror, a walk in reverse along a wall, a girl who flies up to the ceiling, and much play with statues. Many famous films of his have followed this early essay, including *Le Baron Fantôme* and *l'Eternal Retour*, and if his work in literature has declined since the mid-thirties, as some critics say it has, one can claim a definite advance for it in the cinema.

Meanwhile there have been volumes of his graphic art, notably *Le Mystère de Jean l'Oiseleur* and *Dessins d'un Dormeur*. Further, Cocteau's spirit of adventure was implemented by a Jules-Verne-like trip around the world and his love of modernity has caused him to number among his friends such people as Charlie Chaplin, Edith Piaf and the boxer Al Brown. He was the subject of bitter attack in the French press during the occupation and performances of his *Les Parents Terribles* became modern *batailles d'Hernani* until the Germans forbade any more of them. He has had tributes paid him, at some time, by almost everyone of consequence in French literature of the present day and Colette writes, what must be one reason for this, that she like others knows by heart now the legend of Jean Cocteau—'*Jean était triste parce qu'il était bon.*' One of his last books, *La Difficulté d'Etre*, is one of his best and gives the impression, as has every work by this Peter Pan of letters, of being a debut. It is a collection of personal essays on all kinds of subjects—death, friendship, haunted houses, drama, sorrow, the soul, and of characters like Radiguet, Apollinaire, and Diaghilew—in which the maturity of his experience marries perfectly with his scintillating perspicacity, and in which, too, the increasing note of human sympathy in Cocteau's work is predominant. Here, again, we find all his old and courageously held opinions—'*de la femme il reste une élégance, une douceur d'entrailles, une sorte de luxe,*' '*Il faut être précieux*' (from Radiguet), and '*La haine m'est inconnue.*'

It is impossible to summarise this harlequin of the arts for, Proteus-like, he eludes our grasp. Beginning his literary career proper after the first world war he expressed primarily the literature of revolt of that time—'*le manque de tenue est le signe du héros,*' he was to write in *Opium*. As in French literature generally, this revolt took various trends, that of confession, of the study of adolescence, of psychology and of Lafcadio-like irrationality which was summarised by the famous Preface to two of Jean-Victor Pellerin's plays which consists of the following:

*Le Sauvage*: Comment vais-tu?



*Le Civilisé* : Je m'évade.

Cocteau has evinced too the considerable current trait of studies of homosexuality which reach their apogee perhaps in the work of Proust, Gide, Bourdet's *La Prisonnière*, Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1913—though its effect was later) and *The Well of Loneliness*. He even showed the prevalent interest in the sporting life which we have later in de Montherlant, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Saint-Exupéry, for *Le Grand Ecart* boasts as a leading character Stopwell, an English long-jump champion who distinguishes himself in a roller-skating scene. He showed also the pervasive European conception of the English *femme fatale*; thus, for instance, in *Thomas l'Imposteur* there is an English General's daughter, called Miss Hart, who 's'habillait presque en matelot . . . . d'une figure d'ange' and who shocks the French with her promiscuity. One remembers Gide's Lady Griffiths and the veritable prototype of this cherished illusion, Heinrich Mann's Lady Olympia, a robust English lady who stalks through his trilogy *Die Göttinnen*, appearing at odd intervals to seduce good German or French or Italian boys, muttering seductive invitations such as 'Meine Gondel wartet.'

A stranger to every kind of safety (he could never forgive Maurice Barrès), Cocteau has been blessed with a sort of superb skill of manoeuvre which has enabled his art, like his life, to take every turning and to visit, apparently unscathed, every extreme. He wrote, in *Opium*, that no one can succeed who has not known failure, and in *La Difficulté d'Etre* he commented that his sole resource was moral progress. There is indeed something moral in Cocteau's hatred of all systematologies, for he believes that moral systems evolved by mere humans must prove fallible, and he has remained therefore the fiercest enemy of hypocrisy ('Un homme pur doit être libre et suspect.') Cocteau has lived in a high climate, in an attitude of constant crisis, but he has been willing to pay the price for the lack of mortal sustenance in those rarified realms; and if we seek hard enough in him we too will find deep and rewarding glimpses of those spiritual values which alone will not play us false.

## *Elizabeth Siddal: The Ghost of an Idea*

BY IDA PROCTER

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OF all the figures of the Pre-Raphaelite group the palest and the most elusive, the most silent and yet the most poignant and legendary, was that of Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal. Her creative contribution was the smallest in both poetry and painting, but wrought by a bitter obstinate courage in spite of varied adversities and continual ill-health. Her life was over by twenty-nine. Gathering up the fragments of her brief story from other people's letters and diaries and memoirs, we glimpse her as she moves, pallid and aloof, Miss Siddal, the Sid., Lizzie, Liz, Guggums, dear G., usually surrounded by the shadow of romantic drama, the sense of tragedy, by hints of her loveliness, her loneliness, her waywardness and the hopelessness of her physical condition in an age when early death was accepted with a terrible inevitability for anyone who looked thin and transparent-skinned.

That she should ever have entered the orbit of the Pre-Raphaelite scintillation was due to several chance events; almost nothing in her life, except perhaps her leaving it, seems to have been caused by her own volition: any decisive action was out of keeping with her half-submerged, drifting and enigmatic personality.

Elizabeth Siddal's pictorial work is mainly illustration; decorative, delicate, slight, awkward in drawing, but not without charm and imagination, showing a gift for design and demonstrating her contact with the pervasive medieval, chivalric influences of her time. She worked mostly in water-colours, for oils she found too much of a physical strain to manipulate. References occur to some thirteen or fourteen of her pictures, although there may probably have been more: a few of them have now found their way into museums.

Nine of her poems have been published by William Rossetti. They are frail, echoing, plaintive verses, all of them bearing a marked sadness, but the general tone of the age was one of melan-

choly, particularly in lyrics. The wonder is that someone with such scant training and so little strength to uphold a late development, was capable of any complete expression. A stanza in her poem 'A Year And A Day' gives voice to her knowledge of her own distressing situation :

Dim phantoms of an unknown ill  
Float through my tiring brain ;  
The unformed visions of my life  
Pass by in ghostly train ;  
Some pause to touch me on the cheek,  
Some scatter tears like rain.

William Rossetti, who was her brother-in-law, wrote that she 'used to take a great deal of pains, and I fancy was seldom or never satisfied with her productions. One can find a dozen scribblings of the same stanza here and there, modified and corrected.'

Despite her flagging vitality and the frequent emotional conflicts of her adult life, her 'unformed visions' seem never to have deserted her for long, if at all. After a severe bout of illness, she once wrote to Rossetti asking for her paint-box : 'although I am in constant pain and cannot sleep at nights for fear of another illness like the last . . . I should like to have my water-colours sent down, if possible, as I am quite destitute of all means of keeping myself alive.' Her desire to bear witness to the world continued its desperate and valiant struggle for existence in the daylight. She knew it was her inner life's blood.

Elizabeth Siddal was many times painted and drawn by members of the Pre-Raphaelite group. Walter Deverell, the young artist of American birth, who began her career as a model by painting her in page's costume as 'Viola,' died while still in his early twenties. He and Dante Gabriel Rossetti had shared a studio for a time. Other requests followed 'Twelfth Night,' and Elizabeth posed as a Celt for Holman Hunt's 'Christians Sheltering From the Persecution of the Druids,' and for 'Sylvia' in his scene from 'Two Gentlemen of Verona.' Millais painted his drowned 'Ophelia' from her, faithfully observing the floating folds of her garments as she lay, numbed but docile still, in a bath of water gradually cooling. This is one of her most convincingly real appearances in Pre-Raphaelite paint. There was naturally a submerged quality in her expression which admirably suited the subject Millais had seized upon.

Before Rossetti met Elizabeth Siddal he was already obsessed with an admiration for auburn hair. It was a time when hair was

immensely important. Women cultivated masses of hair in order to parade its quantity. It was a feature of femininity almost more observed than the face. Early in 1850, William Rossetti recorded in his journal that Gabriel was 'looking out for a woman with red hair for the Virgin' in his picture of *The Annunciation*. A suitable professional model was found on this occasion.

Rossetti was also seeped in the study of Dante. He had been christened Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti but soon preferred to be known as Dante Gabriel Rossetti. So close was the link between his personal life and the world of his imaginings that he seemed almost to live his creative thoughts: he painted both Gabriel and Dante: he had not yet found a Beatrice. There was also a strong streak of morbidity in his make-up, and when he met the stately, deathly-hued, red-haired Miss Siddal it may even have been this aura of death about her which made her so fitting to be drawn into the Dante-Beatrice myth. She was a person doomed to be legendary. He told Madox Brown that, 'when he first saw her, he felt his destiny was defined.' That moment occurred about 1850, but they did not marry until 1860. In the decade between Rossetti suffered the disconcerting experience of finding his destiny seem to change its course.

Rossetti painted her many times, in water-colours and in oils; he drew numerous sketches of her, so that Madox Brown entered in his diary after he had sat up till 3 in the morning being shown a drawer full of these portraits, that it was like 'a monomania with him. Many of them are matchless in beauty, however, and one day will be worth large sums.' He drew her reading, standing by the window, plaiting her hair, and with a long strand in her mouth, with her head leaning against a cushion, stretching paper on her drawing-board and playing a zither; he drew her with her eyes closed, with her eyes lowered, with her eyes turned away. Of these sketches Ruskin remarked, when he had been through a portfolio of them, that she should be happy 'to see how much more beautifully, perfectly and tenderly' Rossetti drew when drawing her than any other person. 'She cures you of your worst faults when you only look at her,' he told Rossetti.

Even in a daguerrotype of her in her striped black and brown silk dress which appears in Violet Hunt's book, *The Wife Of Rossetti*, her head is turned away, the eyes lowered, her cheek resting on her hand with an air of extreme weariness. Only in her own portrait of herself, painted in 1853, was she forced to reveal the straight full

gaze of her large prominent eyes. In this portrait she combines a likeness to Emily Brontë with something of the expression of Van Gogh's self-portrait in a soft hat. Her brother-in-law, William, said of it: 'It is an absolute likeness.'

Rossetti painted her in his 'Rosso Vestita' in 1850, soon after his first meeting with her. In 1852 he painted her as 'Beatrice' in 'Beatrice At The Marriage Feast.' They were engaged by this time, but years went by and the pictures of her increased, but still they did not marry. In 1856, Rossetti's sister, Christina, wrote her poem 'In An Artist's Studio' which shows her profound awareness of the peculiar situation which had developed even though there was supposed to be a coldness between the future sisters-in-law.

One face looks out from all his canvasses,  
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:

One can imagine the visit, perhaps from the mother and sister, while Rossetti was found to be out, the glances round the walls, at the easel, at the sketches; the inevitable question: 'Why doesn't he marry her?' It seemed to be the custom for intimate friends and relations to make themselves at home while they waited for Rossetti to return to his studio by the river at Blackfriars, to examine the latest work in progress, to glance at the albums, even to look behind the screens. So many pictures of Lizzie. Why doesn't he marry her? Nobody knew the exact answer. But perhaps Christina came nearest to it.

He feeds upon her face by day and night  
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,  
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:  
Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;  
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;  
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

In the deserted studio that day, looking at all the pictures of Lizzie as 'a queen in opal' or 'a saint, and angel,' or 'a nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,' it seems likely that by those strange subterranean groping roots of sympathy which feed a poet's inspiration, she came nearest to the source of the sorrow that tormented them. He painted her as she filled his dream, a haunting, idealised figure, but seldom a very human woman.

A year after her death he completed the 'Beata Beatrix' in memory of her. Of this painting Rossetti himself wrote:

The picture illustrates the 'Vita Nuova,' embodying symbolically



the death of Beatrice as treated in that work. The picture is not intended at all to represent death, but to render it under the semblance of a trance, in which Beatrice, seated at a balcony overlooking the city, is suddenly rapt from earth to heaven.

She was not to be thought of as altogether lost to the Pre-Raphaelite view: it was only the semblance of a trance. She who had not been wholly real in life was not to be thought of as really dead. She had become the ghost of the Pre-Raphaelite idea.

This much painted, yet little known, woman was born in 1832 or 33. She was the daughter of Charles Crookes Siddal, a man from Sheffield who had settled in London, at Kent Place, off the Old Kent Road. His occupation is variously given as cutler or optician. He was a man with a grievance and memories of better days. He had hopes, which were never realised, of recovering, with legal aid, money which he claimed had been his due from remote kin. He married a Welsh woman, Elizabeth Eleanor Evans, at Hornsey in 1824. Both were said to be musical. They had seven children—Annie, Charles, Elizabeth, Lydia, Clara, James and Henry.

From the Old Kent Road, Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal came to work in Mrs. Tozer's millinery shop in Cranbourne Alley, where her attractions having been seen and remembered by William Allingham, a young poet, were reported enthusiastically to Walter Deverell, known to be in need of a model. William Allingham wrote much later in his diary, after she was dead, that 'her pale face, abundant red hair, and long thin limbs were strange and affecting—never beautiful in my eyes.' Nevertheless he took Walter Deverell to glimpse her through the hat-shop window. Deverell was impressed and in his turn took his mother to the shop to make the necessary arrangements for her to become his model.

She cannot have been more than eighteen, if as much. She was already delicate, quiet and non-committal with the remoteness which can be either provocative or annoyingly baffling when so much is left to the imagination. William Rossetti has described her in his memoir of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

She was a most beautiful creature, with an air between dignity and sweetness, mixed with something which exceeded modest self-respect, and partook of disdainful reserve; tall, finely formed, with a lofty neck, and regular yet somewhat uncommon features, greenish-blue unsparkling eyes, large perfect eyelids, brilliant complexion, and a lavish wealth of coppery-golden hair.

The glory of her hair is well known, even if Gabriel Rossetti, in

his exuberance, sometimes made it appear rather exaggeratedly formless like a horse's mane. Reports vary as to the colour of her eyes from grey, light grey, agate and blue, to green and the greenish-blue of William Rossetti's description. Most people seem to have been instantly struck by a strangeness in her, her enigmatic air, her statuesque quality. Her voice was low and sibilant, betokening the easily tired lungs. It was about 1849 or 1850 that she met Dante Gabriel Rossetti for the first time, although he was not the first of the Brotherhood to make her acquaintance. He soon began to appropriate her for his own model and then to inspire her to become his pupil. This was the time when 'hope shone bright' and Lizzie filled Rossetti's dream. By about 1851 they had become engaged, but it is typical of much of the vagueness which surrounds them both that even her brother-in-law should be unable to give the exact year. But Lizzie was never very strong, never well for long at a time, and the drift of years—so fatally easy for artists—began; this year, next year, sometime . . . it was only just saved from becoming never.

Elizabeth Siddal left the careful home off the Old Kent Road and took a lodging at 1, Weymouth Street, and from here she went to work in Rossetti's studio 'overlooking the river at Blackfriars Bridge, 14, Chatham Place.' It was emancipation indeed, but perilous and precarious in the extreme, with only Rossetti's headstrong enthusiasm backing the glimmer of her talent, and no money on either side, and no physical stamina on hers to withstand uncertainty and irregular meals. Of Chatham Place, Rossetti wrote in a letter, 'you cannot imagine what delightful rooms these are for a party, regularly built out into the river, and with windows on all sides—also a large balcony over the water . . .' That was the romantic view. It was characteristically Rossetti's view. But there were also fogs, mists, dampness, smells, dirt and refuse in the river and unwholesome banks of mud exposed at low tides beneath the attractive windows. Cholera and typhoid epidemics were periodically rampant in London at that time. Madox Brown in his journal for 1854 gives this description of a cholera outbreak in London:

· Called on Thomas. Heard from him some curious details of the cholera, which raged furiously round his two streets but did not molest them. Bodies taken from Middlesex Hospital in vans. In the pest-stricken street groups of women and children frantic for their relations taken off. Police and others with stretchers running

about. Undertakers as common as other people in the streets running about with coffins, like lamplighters. Hearses with coffins outside as well as in; people following in cabs. One funeral consisted of a cab, with coffin atop, and people inside.

The whole of Chatham Place was pulled down about 1868. It is not impossible to imagine what delightful rooms they must have been—for a party—but for life it was another matter. Even Rossetti admitted on one occasion that he had been driven to go out for a walk because of the smell from the river. But here Elizabeth Siddal came daily to draw and be drawn. Here she came to work on her own when Rossetti was in Newcastle: 'I want to tell you that Lizzy is painting at Blackfriars while I am away.' And here she was frequently ill. 'Dear Lizzie is very unwell indeed.' Such statements recur like a refrain in most of Rossetti's correspondence. But they continued to live and work at Chatham Place even after their marriage in 1860. Only when Lizzie had taken the fatal dose of laudanum two years later did Rossetti find that the charms of Chatham Place had failed.

By January 1853 Madox Brown was being invited to 'look in at Chatham Place and see dear G.'s drawings.' 'Dear G.' was the short for 'Guggums,' the rather unfortunate pet name devised for Elizabeth by Rossetti. In this year she made an illustration to Wordsworth's 'We Are Seven.' There were seven original members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood when formed in 1851: John Everett Millais: William Holman Hunt: Thomas Woolner: Dante Gabriel Rossetti: James Collinson: Frederick George Stephens: and William Michael Rossetti. By August of the same year she had made 'a perfect wonder of her portrait,' and her attention was turning to an illustration from something of Tennyson's, a fruitful Pre-Raphaelite hunting ground.

Most of the Brotherhood appear to have come under her spell. According to Gabriel 'everyone reveres and adores Lizzie.' Nothing less than sheer reverence and adoration would do for one of Rossetti's temperament, which may in part account for the fact that he found his family's attitude towards Lizzie a little wanting in warmth. But the appreciative Madox Brown called her 'wonderful and lovely Guggums' and 'a stunner and no mistake.' In 1854 he wrote in his journal that he 'saw Miss Siddal, looking thinner and more death-like and more beautiful and more ragged than ever: a real artist, a woman without parallel for many a long year.'

Ruskin declared her sketches were better than Rossetti's and



MISS SIDDAL PLAINTING HER HAIR, BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

*By courtesy of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery, London.*



LADY CLARE, BY ELIZABETH SIDDAL.

*By courtesy of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum.*





‘LADY AFFIXING PENNANT TO KNIGHT’S SPEAR,’ BY ELIZABETH SIDDAL.

*By courtesy of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery, London.*



'HOW THEY MET THEMSELVES,' BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

*By courtesy of W. F. Mansell.*

termed Elizabeth herself 'a noble, glorious creature.' When endeavouring to persuade her to accept the financial aid he wished to make, he wrote to her: 'consider also the plain hard fact is that I think you have genius.' But he also found her difficult sometimes. 'As far as I can make out, she is not ungrateful but sick, and sickly headstrong.' He also described her as 'wilful.' He was not the only one who found her difficult to understand. So did William Rossetti, who might be expected to have had more opportunity for knowing her at home and in homely settings.

I hardly think that I ever heard her say a single thing indicative of her character, or of her serious underlying thought. All her talk was of a 'chaffy' kind— . . . she seemed to say—'My mind and my feelings are my own, and no outsider is expected to pry into them.'

In March of 1854 Elizabeth's health had been so bad that she had at last been induced to see a doctor, always a matter of much coaxing from friends and stern refusal from Elizabeth who bore marked traits in common with Emily Brontë. She had turned down the sensible suggestion that she should go into a sanatorium for 'ladies of small means' and run 'as much like a home as possible' by a Miss Nightingale soon to achieve fame in the Crimea. But she did submit to be examined by a Dr. Wilkinson at this time. He diagnosed a curvature of the spine and said she ought not to paint at present. Rossetti commented in a letter: 'but this, of course, she must. He says her case is a very anxious but by no means a hopeless one. . . .' Even as he wrote she was sitting by him 'working at the most poetical of all possible designs.' What this was he does not mention, but it may have been 'The Quest of the Grail.' The reality of danger seemed to be impossible of comprehension to either. There was still the vision, the ideal, the artistic life to be lived: pictures must be made and poems written: and even if all were full of pathos, yearning, pain and morbidity, it could be accompanied by a certain luscious medieval flamboyance of colour. The situation was anxious but not hopeless. And paint she must.

It was not until 1855 that Elizabeth had her first meeting with Gabriel's mother and the same year that she took him to her home, 'her native crib' as Gabriel called it, 'which,' he wrote in a letter, 'I was glad to find comfortable.' There is no record of Elizabeth's feelings about the Rossetti family.

1855 was also a year of many journeys in search of health. She went for a time to Clevedon. Here she made friends with a small boy having donkey-rides on the sands. He enquired if there were lions and elephants where she came from, and when asked why he should expect any such thing, he replied that 'he was sure she comed from very far, much further than he could see.' Ruskin also arranged for her to visit Oxford and to be examined by Dr. Acland, a friend of his. Dr. Acland's diagnosis was that her lungs were only slightly affected but that her chief trouble was 'mental power long pent up and lately overtaxed.' Once more she was recommended to 'abstain from all work.' Later in the year arrangements were made for her to go to the south of France with a Mrs. Kincaid. One of her letters, written soon after Christmas, remains. It is nothing but facetious complaint, mostly against French officials. She likens one to 'an overdone mutton-chop sticking to a gridiron' and finally moans, somewhat acidly, that 'First class, one can get to the end of the world; but one can never be let alone or left at rest.' She even had to dine in her own room 'on account of bores.' But at least the plum-pudding was good on Christmas Day. They stayed at the Hôtel des Princes, Nice.

William Rossetti gives the years 1855 to 1857 as probably the most productive years for her few poems. He gives nine complete examples amongst his memoirs of Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelitism. There is death in them all. The titles suggest their nature. 'Dead Love.' 'Gone.' 'The Lust of the Eyes.' 'Worn out.' 'At Last.' 'True Love.' 'Speechless.' 'Shepherd Turned Sailor.' 'A Year and a Day.' The tone is generally one of bitterness and despair, sometimes rising to the detached lament of an old ballad:

Soon must I leave thee  
This sweet summer tide;  
That other is waiting  
To claim his pale bride.

In 'The Lust of the Eyes' she is probably putting herself in imagination in Gabriel's place:

I care not for my Lady's soul,  
Though I worship before her smile:  
I care not where be my Lady's goal  
When her beauty shall lose its wile.

IDA PROCTER

In 'Worn Out' she is self-pitying, seeing herself as Christina saw her :

For I am but a startled thing,  
Nor can I ever be  
Aught save a bird whose broken wing  
Must fly away from thee.

I can but give a sinking heart  
And weary eyes of pain,  
A faded mouth that cannot smile  
And may not laugh again.

She was always the centre of her own poems, either directly, as in this from which the above two verses are quoted, or obliquely, as in the others of a more ballad style which deal with parting, grieving and the grave. 'Dead Love' is perhaps the most bracing of her verses, suggesting for once the acceptance of an uncontrollable situation, but the resignation is not without its acrid taste :

Oh never weep for love that's dead,  
Since love is seldom true,

If the merest dream of love were true,  
Then, sweet, we should be in heaven ;  
And this is only earth, my dear,  
Where true love is not given.

In 1856 Lizzie was back in London. Ruskin was paying her £150 a year and taking all the pictures she could find the strength to produce. He also sent her advice and criticism of a more discreet nature than that which he offered Gabriel. He thought that Gabriel 'let her wear herself out with fancies,' when 'she really ought to be made to draw in a dull way sometimes from dull things.' On another occasion he wrote : 'Sister Helen is glorious, and I keep the witch drawing.' But the following year he was complaining that 'I can't bear to see her missing her mark only by a few inches, which she might as easily win as not.' In 1857 she sent several pictures—'Clerk Saunders,' sketches from Browning and Tennyson, 'We Are Seven,' 'The Haunted Tree,' and a study of a head—to an exhibition organised by Madox Brown at Russell Place. Later in the same year William Rossetti was engaged as secretary for an exhibition of British Art to be shown in America. Elizabeth's 'Clerk Saunders' was sent. It was purchased by a Professor



Norton of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and after her death Rossetti exchanged it for one of his own. It is now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England.

It was in 1856 that Gabriel confided to Brown his plans to marry Elizabeth and go off to Algeria. This discussion or disclosure lasted until half-past three in the morning. But nothing came of the plans and by the end of the year she was in Bath, 'rather better than when last in London, and not quite so thin.' But the following year Madox Brown was convinced she was dying, and found Gabriel so unhappy one Sunday that he could not leave him all day. Ruskin wrote to a friend, 'One of the chief hindrances to his progress in art has been his sorrow at the state of the young girl, some of whose work I showed you. I fear that his sorrow will soon be healed'—Ruskin and Madox Brown were as magnificent friends to him as any man could hope for. It was in 1857 that Elizabeth Siddal renounced Ruskin's help, probably because she felt her output was becoming increasingly limited, and most of this year she spent in Matlock trying the hydropathic system. This was in spite of the grace and tact with which Ruskin had explained that he thought of her as a beautiful tree he would wish to save from being cut down, or as 'a bit of Gothic Cathedral whose strength was failing . . .' She can no longer have believed in herself as a bit of Gothic and she was too sternly independent to consent to be a fake.

Misunderstandings of a complicated nature seem to have increasingly marred her relationship with Gabriel. Each had much to contend with. At times Lizzy herself would appear to have wished to give up the thought of their marriage. 'Lizzy has sometimes lately shown so much displeasure on my mentioning our engagement . . .' But Gabriel hoped this was due to her illness even though she was 'quite embittered and estranged from me,' one night. However two days later there was a reconciliation, perhaps on doubtful foundations. 'Kind and patient she has been with me many and many times, more than I have deserved; and I trust this trouble is over.' And when she was taken very ill again at Matlock in November of 1857 and sent for him, he went at once. He seems never to have deliberately neglected her or deserted her at a moment of crisis.

Apart from Rossetti's work, the next two years are so vacant of letters or references in diaries or memoirs as to seem to have been deliberately blotted out. Various models occupied Rossetti's attention. Elizabeth Siddal was probably too frequently ill to have

produced much work. By the spring of 1860 she was again in Hastings, again, ill, and again Gabriel had gone to her. It had taken all his strength to nurse her. She 'seemed ready to die daily and more than once a day,' he wrote to tell Madox Brown. He felt as if he had been dug out of a vault, but she was slightly better and he and Lizzy were going to be married at last. He wrote to tell his mother in April. 'I have hardly deserved that Lizzy should still consent to it, but she has done so, and I trust I may still have time to prove my thankfulness to her.' By May 23 Elizabeth Siddal was sufficiently recovered to make her way to St. Clement's Church, Hastings, and become Mrs. Rossetti after nine years of dalliance and delays. It was the quietest of weddings. Their two selves and their landlord and his wife for witnesses. So weak was the handwriting of Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal at this time that Violet Hunt in her book *The Wife of Rossetti* says 'it was like 'a cockroach scrawling over the tiny oblong indicated for signature.' On the same day that they were married Gabriel had time to write two letters, one to his mother and one to Madox Brown. 'All hail from Lizzie and myself just back from church,' he began the one to Brown, but the gesture of hearty greeting which this implies is painfully out of keeping with the fact that he was unable to give 'any good news of her health.' Nevertheless they went to Folkestone, crossed to Boulogne, and after a few days went on to Paris for their honeymoon.

They stayed a week in the Hôtel Meurice before moving to lodgings in the Rue de Rivoli. The idea of rest in one place seems never to have appealed. The golden promise of health, happiness, peace lay always in some other place. Lizzie believed that Paris suited her; subconsciously it may have been a part of her dream of an artistic life, so Paris it had to be. They did not get about much as they might had Lizzie been stronger, but they both painted pictures. Gabriel completed his strange 'How They Met Themselves,' showing the pair of lovers meeting their ghostly wilting counterparts in a wood. The dates in the corner, 1851/1860, are probably the true dates of their engagement. Elizabeth painted a water-colour, 'The Woeful Victory.' It was a strange and woeful honeymoon.

Towards the end of June they returned to London. Both felt that Blackfriars Bridge was not the best place in London for her to have to live and yet inevitably it seemed to be their only possible home. For a time they had lodgings at Spring Cottage, Downshire

Hill, Hampstead, and kept on the other rooms for Gabriel's work, which, as far as commissions were concerned, was going better than ever. Again Lizzie was very ill and later in the year went to Brighton with her sister Lydia. While she was away Gabriel tried to find them a house of their own at Hampstead, but could get nothing suitable or within their means. He was at work at so many things that he felt in a 'perpetual moil,' he told his aunt. And then Lizzie wrote from Brighton, but she did not want to worry him about her coming back when he had so many things to upset him. She was better, although in constant pain, and he was not to feel anxious about it, as 'I would not fail to let you know in time.' One wonders how deliberately malicious this statement was, but there is no mistaking the tragedy which had taken place when she was reduced to tugging at his sympathy by such desperate and pitiable means. And still she wished for her water-colours to be sent down to her, to keep herself alive, as she put it.

By November they had given up all connection with Hampstead and moved their things to Chatham Place, Blackfriars, when Gabriel wrote to tell his mother that 'Lizzie is so unsettled just now by constant moving.' It was her last move.

In May, 1861, her little store of strength was further taxed by the birth of a dead child, a girl. 'She is doing pretty well, I trust,' Gabriel wrote to his mother. Before this event Gabriel had said of her, 'She has too much courage to be in the least downcast herself.' Her verses reveal another side. There is no sign here of the 'chaff' of which her brother-in-law complained: 'All her talk was of a "chaffy" kind—its tone sarcastic, its substance lightsome.'

The following month of this year, Christina Rossetti, in her detached poet's vigil, wrote her poem 'Wife To Husband,' which begins:

Pardon the faults in me,  
For the love of years ago:  
Good-bye.  
I must drift across the sea,  
I must sink into the snow,  
I must die.

You can bask in this sun,  
You can drink wine, and eat:  
Good-bye.

IDA PROCTER

I must gird myself and run,  
Though with unready feet :  
I must die.

Although Gabriel was sometimes supposed to be annoyed with Christina for what he imagined was her want of cordiality towards Lizzie, it is easy to see the kind of barrier which came between the two women. Each was in her own way difficult to know. Each was of a silent disposition. Of Christina, Madox Brown said : ' She works at worsted ever, and rarely speaks . . . '—an awe-inspiring combination. They were probably too much alike. Each lacked the frankness and warmth to have made friendship possible between them. No doubt Christina knew, through Gabriel who liked to share most of his enthusiasms, of Lizzie's verse-writing, secret and personal though it was. Christina evidently sometimes attempted painting portraits, for in an early letter Gabriel had jokingly warned her not to ' rival the Sid, but keep within respectful limits.' Christina may not have been good at taking chaff, and if she felt herself to have been warned off painting, her gift of a paper-box, if it were intended as a waste-paper-box, to Lizzie and Gabriel after they were married, may have been a subtle retaliation warning her off the field of poetry. Elizabeth was very much one alone, one who had cast her family into the background and adopted the mode of living of another and finding herself forced to accept, along with the gains on the roundabouts, a lot of losses on the swings. The Rossettis were very much a family, solid and loyal, usually to be met with in a group. Elizabeth's beliefs were undefined : her knowledge uncertain. The Rossettis were accomplished people, with strong opinions and marked boundaries to their religious thought. It was enough to produce a situation of apprehension on either side. William Rossetti, Elizabeth's brother-in-law, could never discover ' what anything meant to her.' She had a reputation for turning aside from all serious conversation with a joke. It may have been courage. It may have been a sense of inferiority. The Pre-Raphaelites were mostly scholarly people used to intellectual talk : Gabriel could talk all night. Silence may have seemed safer to Lizzie, or just more restful.

Nevertheless, at a much deeper level than the trivialities of social intercourse Christina without being able to express it, probably understood Elizabeth better than any of the friends, brilliant as they mostly were, with whom her relationship with Gabriel had surrounded her. Her own broken, frustrated, lost love would have

ELIZABETH SIDDAL: THE GHOST OF AN IDEA

made her doubly sensitive to perceiving Elizabeth's distress. She expressed much of Lizzie's pain and fear with greater charm and competence than Lizzie herself. In spite of her affection for Gabriel she did not flinch from seeing him as he was : or from seeing him seeing Lizzie ' not as she is, but as she fills his dream.' By October of 1861 she had begun to write ' The Prince's Progress,' a poem of accusing regret.

Too late for love, too late for joy,  
Too late, too late !  
You loitered on the road too long,  
You trifled at the gate.

Her heart was starving all this while  
You made it wait.

Ten years ago, five years ago,  
One year ago,  
Even then you had arrived in time,  
Though somewhat slow.  
Then you had known her living face  
Which now you cannot know : . . .

The shock of the events which were to follow in four months' time was probably the reason for this poem not being completed until 1865.

Following the birth of her dead child, Lizzie took to increasing doses of laudanum to relieve her sleeplessness and neuralgia. Otherwise life went on a little more gaily for Gabriel who had never been so busy with work, and was consequently able to entertain more freely than ever in his ' so delightfully quaint ' riverside abode at Chatham Place.

For nine years Gabriel had known that the rooms at Blackfriars Bridge were not the best for her health. Less than five weeks after he had written this description of them, Gabriel's torpidity was shaken. Lizzie's powers of endurance failed her, or perhaps tiredness made her careless ; but she took an overdose of laudanum while Gabriel was out.

They had been to dinner with Swinburne at the Hotel Sablonière in Leicester Square, on the evening of Monday, February 10. To Algernon she had appeared as usual but a little weaker perhaps. To Gabriel she ' seemed somewhat between flightiness and drowsiness, a little excited.' So each recalled when giving evidence at



the inquest. They had come home early and Gabriel went out again about nine in the evening. Later when he returned he found her in bed, unable to be roused, and the laudanum bottle empty. She was beyond the help of the doctors he fetched.

His family, his faithful friends, Madox Brown, Ruskin, and Swinburne, all came to his aid. He was at first incapable of accepting the fact of Lizzie's death and recalled the doctor to make sure it was not a trance. In his grief were many mixed emotions ; fear, remorse, sorrow, pity and primitive morbidity struggled together. Impulsively he placed his manuscript book of poems beside her in her coffin. They might have quarrelled frequently, she might have had to forgive him many things more often than he deserved, but he had never been ungenerous or unresponsive, he had never been lacking in emotion in a dramatic situation, never slow in making the fit romantic gesture. He had written many of these poems to her, for her and in her presence. She should take something of his into eternity.

For seven years the poems remained buried before Gabriel began to hanker for them. He wished to publish a collected edition. In many cases his only record was in the manuscript book so far beyond his reach and yet so tormentingly preserved. It was eventually arranged that the book should be exhumed at night and by the light of a purifying fire. Gabriel did not have to be present. Shortly before the decision was made he was staying in Scotland, and while out walking with a friend came upon a chaffinch, frequently the tamest of wild birds, which allowed him to pick it up. To the friend it suggested a pet bird escaped from a cage ; but for Gabriel the situation was charged with the supernatural. Lizzie had been fond of birds, had kept doves and a bullfinch. He had written a valentine to her, to his ' dear dove divine.' At one time he had been in the habit of drawing a dove in place of writing her name. The chaffinch which let his hands close round it without fear, without fluttering, must be his wife, the spirit of her, ' the soul of her has taken this shape.'

He had always been so afraid of the sight of death : he had avoided all his friends' funerals with plausible excuses. Now it had crept close to him. There was no escape this time ; except for drugs. He took to dosing himself with chloral.

Gabriel Rossetti left Chatham Place and settled in Cheyne Walk. In a dark house he shut himself away more and more from the outside world. It was nearly twenty years later that Hall Caine,

as a young man, came to see him. In his book, *My Story*, he describes the gloom and the weirdness of Rossetti's Chelsea home, and the 'want of harmony' in his nature which soon became apparent to the young Caine: and yet the fascination of Rossetti's conversation, his melodious voice, his wit, his laugh, his personal charm, aroused and held his staunch friendship to the end of Rossetti's life.

On his second visit Caine recalls that Rossetti said to him: 'As for all the prattle about Pre-Raphaelitism, I confess to you I am weary of it, and long have been. Why should we go on talking about the visionary vanities of half-a-dozen boys? We've all grown out of them, I hope, by now.' So much for the dreams of his youth, but they stayed up talking until four in the morning. On their way to bed, candles in hand, his host took Caine into the drawing-room, a large room, seldom used and smelling musty.

On the walls were a number of small water-colour drawings in plain oak frames. Rossetti drew me up to the pictures, and I remember that they seemed to me rather crude in colour and in drawing, but very touching in sentiment (one in particular, representing a young girl parting from her lover on the threshold of a convent, being deeply charged with feeling), and that I said: 'I should have thought that the man who painted these pictures was rather a poet than a painter—who was it?' Rossetti, who was standing before the drawing, as I see him still, in the dark room with the candle in his hand, said in a low voice, 'It was my wife. She had great genius.'

The Pre-Raphaelite idea was dead for Rossetti, but not its ghost. He had not forgotten the flicker of genius he had tried to develop in Lizzie Siddal.

Swinburne was another who never forgot her. Years after her death he recalled her 'marvellous charms of mind and person—her matchless grace, loveliness, courage, endurance, wit, humour, heroism and sweetness—' There seems little else she could wish to have remembered except that he makes no reference to any of her work.

In the Tate Gallery are two of her water-colours: 'Lady Affixing Pennant to a Knight's Spear,' and 'Sir Patrick Spens.' 'Lady Clare' and the 'Clerk Saunders' are at the Fitzwilliam Museum. At a Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition held in Birmingham in 1947 ten of her pictures were shown; her self-portrait, an oil, and six water-colours, which, besides the two mentioned belonging to the Tate,

IDA PROCTER

included 'The Haunted Wood,' a 'Madonna and Child,' and 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' and in the drawing section three pen-and-ink pictures, 'Lady Clare,' 'Pippa Passes,' and 'The Lovers.' There is a 'St. Cecilia' attributed to her in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

For all the encomiums of her gifted friends, Elizabeth Siddal remains an enigmatic personality. Behind the wall of her silence and her ill-health she remains hidden even after death. The few examples of her letters which have been published reveal little: they are facetious, commonplace and stilted, perhaps from exhaustion, perhaps from disappointment—for letters, like quarrels, are mostly the result of the interplay of two personalities. Her poems betray a different mood: they are the essence of death in life: their sadness is hardly relieved by one note of hope. This was probably the truer voice of herself, her inner voice when alone with herself, without any necessity to chaff the intruder away; no longer the child of a large family, of a crowded household, manufacturing for herself a little corner of privacy. In her poem 'Shepherd Turned Sailor' there is a couplet which runs:

If thou art lost then all is lost  
And all is dead to me.

I believe she staked her life's happiness on her love for Gabriel when she set herself up in Weymouth Street, for Gabriel, 'the incarnation of perverseness' as Madox Brown called him, and lost.

Among her women friends she seems to have had a warm affection for the wife of Edward Burne-Jones—Georgiana or 'my dear little Georgie' as she wrote to her. Together they had planned to write and illustrate a book of fairy-tales, but it never got beyond one story each and a few sketches carried out by Georgie Burne-Jones. In her memoirs of her husband she wrote: 'It is pathetic to think how we women longed to keep pace with the men.' Several of the women of the group studied wood-engraving with the hope of being able to engrave their own husband's pictures. But for Mrs. Rossetti she felt it was a different matter; she thought that she among them had 'original power' even though she could see the controlling eye of Gabriel 'always looking over her shoulder.'

The movement of which Elizabeth Siddal was an inconclusive but valiant particle was a failure. In spite of the wealth of talent in the Brotherhood, its capacity for enthusiasm, its sense of mission

ELIZABETH SIDDAL: THE GHOST OF AN IDEA

and dedication, the gallant attempt to tilt a lance against industrialism and the apathy and ugliness to come with its progress did not succeed. Their aim, 'truth to the objects before one,' led them into triviality and diffuseness. Their desire to escape from the sordidness and tawdriness of nineteenth-century life and from the worst influences of 'sloshy' painting and well-worn themes led them to engage in too much dressing-up, with the conviction that it was all in the sacred name of imagination. To-day many of their pictures seem sentimental, over-elaborate, exaggerated, and—crowning irony of all—artificial and affected. It is probably not possible to make a deliberate cult of sincerity without in the process a measure of insincerity creeping in also.

And what can be said of the achievements of Elizabeth Siddal herself? Not more than a dozen poems and probably less than twenty pictures : and a dead child. A woeful victory indeed when weighed in the balance of material values. But she has left us, like the moulded glove of a departed visitor discarded upon the hall-table, the delicate skin of her personality, the legend of her charm and courage, the bloom of a strange lustre which was never destroyed by despair or poverty or ill-health.

## *A Special Occasion*

BY JOYCE CARY

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THE nursery door opened and Nurse's voice said in the sugary tone which she used to little girl guests, 'Here you are, darling, and Tommy will show you all his toys.' A little brown-haired girl in a silk party frock, sticking out all round her legs like a lampshade, came in at the door, stopped, and stared at her host. Tom, a dark little boy, aged five, also in a party suit, blue linen knickers, and a silk shirt, stared back at the girl. Nurse had gone into the night nursery, next door, on her private affairs.

Tom, having stared at the girl for a long time as one would study a curiosity, rare and valuable, but extremely surprising, put his feet together, made three jumps forward and said, 'Hullo.'

The little girl turned her head over one shoulder and slowly revolved on one heel, as if trying to examine the back of her own frock. She then stooped suddenly, brushed the hem with her hand, and said, 'Hullo.'

Tom made another jump, turned round, pointed out of the window, and said in a loud voice something like 'twanky tweedle.' Both knew that neither the gesture nor the phrase was meant to convey a meaning. They simply expressed the fact that for Tom this was an important and exciting, a very special occasion.

The little girl took a step forward, caught her frock in both hands as if about to make a curtsy, rose upon her toes, and said in a prim voice, 'I beg your pardon.'

They both gazed at each other for some minutes with sparkling eyes. Neither smiled, but it seemed that both were about to smile.

Tom then gave another incomprehensible shout, ran round the table, sat down on the floor and began to play with a clockwork engine on a circular track. The little girl climbed on a tricycle and pedalled round the floor. 'I can ride your bike,' she said.

Tom paid no attention. He was trying how fast the engine could go without falling off the track.

The little girl took a picture book, sat down under the table with her back to Tom, and slowly, carefully, examined each page. 'It's



got a crooked wheel,' Tom said, 'that's what it is.' The little girl made no answer. She was staring at the book with round eyes and a small pursed mouth—the expression of a nervous child at the zoo when the lions are just going to roar. Slowly and carefully she turned the next page. As it opened, her eyes became larger, her mouth more tightly pursed, as if she expected some creature to jump out at her.

'Tom.' Nurse, having completed her private business, came bustling in with the air of one restored to life after a dangerous illness. 'Tom, you naughty boy, is this the way you entertain your guests? Poor little Jenny, all by herself under the table.' The nurse was plump and middle-aged; an old-fashioned nanny.

'She's not by herself,' Tom said.

'Oh Tom, that really is naughty of you. Where are all your nice manners? Get up, my dear, and play with her like a good boy.'

'I am playing with her,' Tom said, in a surly tone, and he gave Nurse a sidelong glance of anger.

'Now Tom, if you go on telling such stories, I shall know you are trying to be naughty. Get up now when I ask you.' She stooped, took Tom by the arm, and lifted him up. 'Come now, you must be polite, after you've asked her yourself and pestered for her all the week.'

At this public disclosure, Tom instantly lost his temper and yelled, 'I didn't—I didn't—I won't—I won't.'

'Then I'll have to take poor little Jenny downstairs again to her mummy.'

'No—no—no.'

'Will you play with her then?'

'No, I hate her—I never wanted her.'

At this the little girl rose and said, in precise indignant tones, 'He is naughty, isn't he?'

Tom flew at her, and seized her by the hair; the little girl at once uttered a loud scream, kicked him on the leg, and bit his arm. She was carried screaming to the door by Nurse, who, from there, issued sentence on Tom, 'I'm going straight to your father, as soon as he comes in.' Then she went out, banging the door.

Tom ran at the door and kicked it, rushed at the engine, picked it up and flung it against the wall. Then he howled at the top of his voice for five minutes. He intended to howl all day. He was suffering from a large and complicated grievance.

JOYCE CARY

All at once the door opened and the little girl walked in. She had an air of immense self-satisfaction as if she had just done something very clever. She said in a tone demanding congratulation, 'I've come back.'

Tom gazed at her through his tears and gave a loud sob. Then he picked up the engine, sat down by the track. But the engine fell off at the first push. He gave another sob, looked at the wheels, and bent one of them straight.

The little girl lifted her party frock behind in order not to crush it, sat down under the table, and drew the book on to her knee.

Tom tried the engine at high speed. His face was still set in the form of anger and bitterness, but he forgot to sob. He exclaimed with surprise and pleased excitement, 'It's the lines too—where I trod on 'em.'

The little girl did not reply. Slowly, carefully, she opened the book in the middle and gazed at an elephant. Her eyes became immense, her lips minute. But suddenly, and, as it were, accidentally, she gave an enormous sigh of relief, of very special happiness.

## Forger Versus Critic

BY LAWRENCE GOWING

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**F**ORGERY is in one sense its own justification. The forger may be exposed, reviled, convicted; his products, however deceiving, are always hideous. Nevertheless he is our benefactor. He contributes to the gaiety of nations. He leaves behind one original thing—a work of art, almost, in itself, a wicked joy for ever—he leaves us the memory of a moment of unique and perfect entertainment, one of those moments which illuminate hidden truth in a flash of terrible hilarity. He confirms a suspicion we have not dared to voice, the suspicion that the ample corporate body of the arts runs more than a little to fat: he satisfies at last the secret resentment that experts who are never wrong inspire. Of a sudden the secret is out, the fake is evident; institutions and reputations topple, the whole pomp of connoisseurship and expertise sprawls in its invalidish grossness before us. For a day the forger is hero and we love him. Then he disappears, back, we suppose, into his ingenious, anonymous limbo; the institutes and the experts, as is their way, gather themselves together again. We are left only with the memory—and the forgery, the precious, indispensable æsthetic banana-skin.

So it was with Van Meegeren. There was never such a forger before, for the cream of his jest was that it, in all its inconoclastic perfection, was deliberate. Profit was without doubt among Van Meegeren's motives. Few men and certainly not one so inveterately extravagant and insecure, could have turned from the tempting course which finally earned him three-quarters of a million pounds. No other painter has ever made such a fortune, but it seems clear that when Van Meegeren started work in 1936 on his *Emmaus* his motive was not so much money as malice. The psychological pattern is clear, almost too clear indeed—nowadays writers simplify such things. As a sensitive, artistic child he had brought his drawings to his puritanical father only to have them, so the story goes, torn up before his eyes. When he set up as a professional artist, painting as always to his own entire satisfaction,

he found that it was now the critics who denied him his legitimate recognition. His career was not in fact particularly unsuccessful, but only the most complete triumph would have appeased him. Few painters love criticism, of course, but for him there was more particular occasion for bitterness. Dutch painters, even more than the Italians, work under the heavy shadow of their national heritage and Van Meegeren was the contemporary of a formidable generation of historians and critics. Under the leadership of De Groot and Bredius, whose single word was sufficient to authenticate a Rembrandt or a Vermeer, critics pontificated as never before. The value of a picture, old or new, depended on the name of its painter, and that, it seemed, depended on the judgement of men whose knowledge of the business of painting was sometimes far from impressive. Thus critics became Van Meegeren's natural enemies. When his marriage broke up and he ran away with another man's wife, it was the wife of a well-known art-critic whom he chose. And when at last, disappointed and neglected, he retired from the scene of his defeats and settled in the South of France, it was to plan not only his own triumph but the final discomfiture of art-criticism.

The story, or as much of it as was ever discovered, is now well enough known. The success of the *Emmaus* was complete. Bredius pronounced it a Vermeer on sight and himself contributed largely to the fund which purchased it for the Rotterdam museum at a price, reasonable enough had it been what it seemed, of more than £50,000. How did this happen? How did it come about that the elaborate system of connoisseurship and expertise which had in the preceding hundred years sorted out with very considerable efficiency the vast accumulation of Dutch seventeenth-century painting, discarding forgeries in their thousands, broke down so completely in this crucial case?

For a start, Van Meegeren chose his ground well and prepared it thoroughly. He not only discovered an artificial resin which imitated with startling closeness the character of old paint, he astutely chose to copy a painter of whom very little is known. In art-history, like other studies, ignorance is fertile of conjecture and it is fair to say that in the thirties the historical study of Vermeer was in a state of confusion. From this Van Meegeren benefited to the full.

Historians, without very much justification, supposed that Vermeer was strongly influenced by the school of Caravaggio: Van Meegeren

looked out a little known Caravaggio and based his design upon it. Seeking other influences (the favourite recourse of art-historians confronted with a puzzle) one writer suggested, for no evident reason, that one of Vermeer's pictures was based on a work by Claes Moeyaert at Amsterdam; Van Meegeren copied a hand from the Moeyaert and used it for his central figure. The chronology of an artist's development is always an important factor in understanding him, but in Vermeer's case chronology remained quite uncertain, a matter of random speculation: one writer even placed what is in fact the masterpiece of his maturity among the earliest known works. Van Meegeren ingeniously combined the two styles in one, holding, as it were, a flattering mirror to the face of criticism. The effect was wonderfully deceptive and the critics, with hardly an exception, fell.

The years in the South of France before the war were Van Meegeren's great period. Although his later statements were contradictory, and in all probability concealed much, it seems likely that he painted then not only two De Hoochs, one of which unaccountably passed into a good Dutch collection, a fair Frans Hals, a tolerable Ter Borch and the *Emmaus* but also two Vermeer *Last Suppers* which were hardly less brilliant; one was later bought, against keen competition, by the greatest private collector in Holland, while the other was so effectively concealed that it was only when he revealed its existence on his deathbed that it was unearthed. His powers were at their height and the rapture which he must have felt can be imagined. He had proved his point. By a simple, almost praiseworthy, device he had shown that he was a master, that his pictures only required a great name for their great merits to be acclaimed, that names, and the whole apparatus of criticism with its neat judgements and labels, were worth nothing at all.

There is something sublime about this secret apotheosis; only the great men of history see their private, impossible pretensions so fulfilled. The glory of it ultimately destroyed Van Meegeren. Yet for a time it seemed as if he could make no mistake. With the war he returned to Holland, painting one Vermeer after another, selling each, more and more openly, for a bigger price than the last. The forgeries degenerated, becoming more and more like the oleographs which hang in Sunday schools, becoming, finally, hardly distinguishable from Van Meegeren's avowed works. They remained unquestioned; his fortune grew. He squandered it;



more flowed in. He bought properties everywhere, possessions of every kind. Still his pockets were full. He hid money, lost it, filled tins with it, buried them and forgot the places, became addicted, as we are darkly told, to every kind of excess. Still he was immensely rich.

Then, at the peace, the blow fell, with the same farcical logic that marks every turn in the story. A Vermeer, wretched enough yet still undoubted, was found in Goering's enormous hoard and traced to Van Meegeren. He was accused of betraying the nation's artistic patrimony to the enemy. He claimed that he had bought the picture in Italy, only to find himself suspected of Fascism. There was an inconsequent appropriateness in the charge; this pattern of personal frustration driving a bad painter upon a crazy, yet hideously compelling, crusade is the very pattern which bedevilled Europe for two decades. Van Meegeren was a characteristic creature of his time and history devoured him. In prison, deprived of the drugs on which he now depended, hardly less unhinged perhaps by the mad incongruity of an investigation beside which his own mania seemed entirely reasonable, told the incredible truth. He had painted all of a dozen convincing forgeries, of which two at least were accounted among the major masterpieces of Dutch art; he painted another then and there to prove it. The experts foregathered in sackcloth and agreed at length in a portentous report that it was indeed true. An international committee was called together and a large book of the scientific data was published, proving, or seeming to prove, again that Van Meegeren had done it. He was tried, very leniently sentenced, and within a year he was dead.

That should be the end of the story. But the manias of the mad have a life of their own and they are often strangely long-lived. This year, first in a lecture, then in an even larger book, M. Jean Decoen has suggested that the experts, in their repentance, were Van Meegeren's victims in a deeper sense than they supposed: The *Emmaus* and the *Last Supper*, he announces, are in fact genuine works by Vermeer. This hypothesis presents, of course, certain difficulties. It requires, first, the assumption that Van Meegeren had the fortune to discover not only one but two Vermeers and then forwent the honour of publishing them in order to use them as a basis for forging more. It requires us to suppose, moreover, that the results of the scientific analysis of the pictures were more or less deliberately falsified, and further that the *Last Supper*

discovered after Van Meegeren's death was in fact forged by the authorities to establish that the other version was a forgery.

The suggestion is, of course, fantastic; it is as if we were to suppose that the authorities of the British Museum and the National Physical Laboratory had conspired, from motives unknown, to suggest that the Boswell journals were written by T. J. Wise. It is not in fact clear that such a book could have been published in this country without fear of the law. The confusion that has resulted is none the less fascinating, and not only because over the new allegations against critics and experts, embracing everything from incompetence and malice to further forgeries, all directed to impeding, almost to persecuting, M. Decoen, there seems to hang the shadow of a way of thought curiously like that of Van Meegeren himself. It is clear that the original scientific findings were, to say the least of it, inconclusive and the Belgian authority chiefly responsible has now suggested that the matter of the resins should be submitted to another international committee: this, one feels, is where one came in.

For the present the scientists on both sides retain as little credit as the critics; certainly it is curious that none of them remarked that there exist infra-red spectrometers, in this country if not in Belgium or in Holland, capable of molecular analysis which would determine if a resin were natural or artificial in a few minutes. It is even stranger and more ominous that in the field of style and æsthetic judgement we are farther from any agreement than ever. We have only Van Meegeren's word, after all, that the known forgeries represent the complete tally, and the last of these was revealed on his deathbed to his heirs. If he had lived longer could he have revealed more? Did he perhaps hope to the last to save something from the wreck? Was Vermeer really the only great painter on whom he practised his peculiar art? What, for instance, was in a packing-case of Van Meegeren's, measuring about five feet by three, whose contents are still unknown to us? One might imagine a picture in the style of some rare and little understood but highly valued seventeenth-century master, signed of course, even dated perhaps, in any case of the greatest historical importance, nothing less than a masterpiece, with nothing to show its real author except the ingratiatingly pathetic yet impotent look of a face, with its high, arched brows . . . could we be sure of recognizing it? A puzzling picture rather like this does in fact exist. There seems no end to the confusions that Van Meegeren left behind.

What of Van Meegeren's original campaign, his campaign against art-criticism? We must own, I think, that he has won it; he has indeed proved his point, more profoundly perhaps than he would have wished. Connoisseurship, of course, remains with us, a necessary and humanly fallible activity, but the æsthetic assumption on which the traditional connoisseur depended is discredited. It is now hardly possible, and not only or chiefly because of Van Meegeren, to believe in the man who volunteers to take a picture into a room by himself, and tell us, independent of history or authorship, whether it is beautiful or ugly, valuable or worthless. Some pictures plainly have a significance that transcends their decorative and associative interest: we pay tribute to them every day, but we can hardly believe that it is simply an intrinsic, objective quality, perceptible in isolation, that gives them their power. Perhaps it is most likely that pictures, at least as we know them in post-renaissance Europe, hold their deepest meaning for us in a personal context. We value in them the unfolding of a personal purpose. They are pieces of an artist's life and to gather what each fragment has to offer we must know or guess at the whole. The tyranny of the name on the label which makes a canvas worth fifty thousand pounds, the tyranny against which Van Meegeren rebelled, is less unreasonable than he thought. A label is not a guarantee of beauty, indeed the idea that some hypothetical quality is necessarily common to all admirable pictures is one with which we can now well dispense. The point of the label, its justification, is that it indicates a picture's relevance to a unity of thought, in fact to the essence of a man's life; it indicates the kind of connection which alone can give profound meaning to any single picture. What haunted Van Meegeren, crazed him and destroyed him, was the tyranny of an obsolete æsthetic. His pictures remain to remind us of a difficult lesson. They are also, at least as memorably, all that is left of one of the greatest and most macabre of jokes.

## Froy and His Diva

BY MARY MURRY

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**T**O us, his fellow-regulars at the local, his fellow-players in the New Philharmonic, he seemed neither old nor young, of no known age: he was outside all age-groups, all associations, all intimacies, quite alone.

We accepted him, acclaimed him even when, after rehearsals, he arrived to take up his usual position, back to the wall, one elbow on the bar. We had a tolerant affection for his passive, comfortable presence: it imparted the same air of reassurance and good cheer as a plump, purring cat upon the hearth, and yet he was never any more of us, of the gathering, than the solitary animal. We carried on our conversations across and around him, taking him for granted as we would a piece of solid furniture, some familiar fixture we'd miss only by the draught souging through the gap it left. Even the older ones, who must have witnessed his steady expansion through the years, even they had no more than hearty commonplaces for him, and he would reply as heartily, grateful for their notice.

But when at last he had laboriously transferred his weight back on to his feet and said good night, the stir of his departure was always followed by a regretful, slightly guilty silence which someone was sure to break by remarking: Nice chap, Froy.

Nice chap, Froy, we thought. (He would have a name like Esmé!) Good fellow. Steady. Gave sound advice—and then only when you asked for it. Good-natured, easy-going, but discreet. And reliable. Never tight when he shouldn't be, never late for rehearsal. Never known to play a wrong note either. Fine ear, old Froy. Fine sense of phrasing, too. Fine, sensitive musician altogether. First-class.

Pity the piccolo hadn't more to it, more scope, more opportunities, more of a future in it. Like the violin or the 'cello. Or the oboe, or even the clarinet, if he must stick to woodwind. But it had its moments, the piccolo. Oh, it had its moments!

There was the *obbligato*, for instance, the *obbligato* which the Pocket Soprano sprang upon him at rehearsal.

Our Resident Conductor demurred—one could hardly protest to a guest soloist of international repute, so he demurred. Her choice for an encore was—er—unusual. She agreed. Quite—er—unusual. She agreed. Most—er—Most—er—Unusual? she suggested with malicious innocence. Quite so, quite so, but an *obbligato*, a flute *obbligato*, would require an inordinate amount of rehearsal. Inordinate? Well, after all, it was not a programme item, was it? She retaliated with a dazzling, thrusting smile with enough power and drive behind it to launch another thousand ships.

‘My dear *Maestro*, everything I rehearse I think of as a programme item. Don’t you?’

‘But my dear *Diva*—’ he began, perilously near to protesting. Too late. She had already handed a copy to the First Flute.

‘I’m so sorry,’ she apologised, easily, lightly, gracefully, to our Conductor, ‘but there seem to be only these two copies in existence.’

‘Purcell, did you say? I probably know it.’ But he sounded merely as disgruntled as he was feeling.

Once more the brilliant, vanquishing battery of a smile: ‘Oh, no, that’s quite impossible.’

‘Indeed?’

‘You see, it has only just been discovered. I discovered it! In a bundle of old manuscript music I bought at a sale. And I only said ascribed to Purcell. That’s why I don’t want it formally announced. I want to try it out first as an encore, unofficially as it were. I think the reaction of the public should be interesting, don’t you? Not to mention the critics’, if any!’

It was all over. She had carried the day. And our Conductor so far capitulated as to accept her casual invitation to look over somebody’s shoulder. But, stopping short of complete and ignominious surrender, he chose the shoulder of his First Flute. Flutey, as we called him, was a scanty chicken of a man with an undue regard for authority, five mouths to feed and an ulcer.

The Conductor’s smouldering breath on his pink, plucked nape so unnerved him that he bungled the reading badly. In the middle of a *tremolo* passage the *Diva* broke off with ominous abruptness, while over his First Flute’s head the Conductor smiled in a kind of perverted triumph. Raised eyebrows, raised shoulders—You see?

Brazenly she flashed back at him: ‘It’s the instrument, the tone that’s all wrong, isn’t it? This is seventeenth-century music,



and a modern concert flute isn't bright, delicate, acute enough. What I really want—and what I'm sure the composer intended—is the trill of a soaring lark. I must have a second, a companion lark. I must have your Piccolo. Which is he?'

The score was now hastily thrust into the fumbling, astonished hands of Esmé Froy. Of course it fluttered to the floor. He grabbed after it, too late. And there it lay—like the whistling Bavarian gentleman's missing dachshund—in the most impossible of places, between his own two feet. He rose up, overturning his chair and his music-stand, which were hastily righted by the Second Flute next to him, and, suspecting from long experience where the score must have settled, he neatly sidestepped so that it came once more within his range of vision. Then, sighing with satisfaction at having spotted it and even more deeply at the prospect of having to exert himself further to bend down and retrieve it, he proceeded with enormous difficulty to fold his whale-like bulk in two.

A lark. A trilling, soaring lark. A fit companion for the tiny, exquisite Soprano. She recoiled in embarrassment, momentarily suspecting the Conductor of having used poor old Froy to play a practical joke upon her in revenge. As if in confirmation the Harp began to titter *en sourdine*. But the rest of us kept staunchly silent. The Conductor, who would have liked to look injured, looked merely disagreeably blank. Instead of rapping, outraged, for instant silence, he laid down his baton with an extravagantly theatrical gesture of resignation of the dispossessed. It had pleased the Diva to usurp: so be it. The direction was no longer in his hands.

As for the Diva, twisting her fingers with chagrin, she turned brusquely away on the impossibly high, impossibly pointed heel of her exiguous shoe. She could never bear unintentionally to wound the so patently vulnerable.

Froy himself, however, seemed quite unaware of the storm and stress about him—they say there's no calmer spot than the centre of a cyclone. Having settled himself once more in his place, with the score safely propped on his stand, he began with an eager serenity to explore the lost song now found again. The unheard air so enchanted the musician in him that the man became quite oblivious of his surroundings, his fellow-players, the Conductor, even the Diva. Without waiting, without warning, he raised his piccolo to his lips and, miraculously, his fleshy, pendulous finger-

tips released the long pent-up melody as tenderly as a woman might blow a kiss. Then, with a little shake of the head and a sigh of satisfaction, he smiled deeply and secretly into his clutter of chins and began the *obbligato*. Attacked it, I should have said, employing a brilliant, crystalline tone as keen and pure and brittle as ice-splinters from an April sky.

The Diva was listening like all of us, entranced. His first exploratory caresses of the lost aria had halted her retreat and lured her back, and now his magically sparkling piccolo drew after it her warm human voice, swooped upon it, paused in flight, fainted like a courting cockbird, doubled back on it, lifted it, tossed it, and finally caught and fondled it until the two were one.

None of us had ever heard anything quite like it, except perhaps a connoisseur's recording of some choice fragment of the illustrious past. After a moment of cracking silence we began to applaud helplessly, irresistibly, more as an outlet to our own emotions than a conscious tribute to their artistry. We even cheered, and the Third Trombone, who hadn't long come out of the Forces, so far forgot himself as to let out an outrageous wolf-whistle and stamp his feet.

The Diva was radiant. She was quite used to having to deal with outbursts of mass-hysteria in her audiences—but that was the public. Such an obviously spontaneous exhibition of enthusiasm by jaded, rehearsal-weary experts was another thing altogether. She was excited, exhilarated by the Piccolo's evocative performance, her own response and their combined effect upon us, so exhilarated that she seemed poised physically for flight. But then her feet hardly touched the ground anyway, just the tip of the toe and a pinpoint of a heel. She fluttered over to Froy.

He was grounded all right. Stranded. Now that it was all over and he'd come only too literally back to earth, right out of his natural element, there was nothing left, nothing but a great mountain of flesh upon flesh, capped by a silly, embarrassed simper. And that was how he appeared to himself too—I could see that.

She took his great dollop of a hand in both of hers and breathlessly thanked him—almost humbly. She might have been a schoolchild receiving a prize from the headmaster.

He hadn't even the wit to stand up, or maybe he hadn't room and was afraid of the general upheaval it would cause, so he just sat on, simpering. But she didn't seem to notice that side of him

#### FROY AND HIS DIVA

and began to discuss the score. One of the Trumpets behind prodded him, but by the time he had realised what for she had sat down beside him and the need had passed. So he put his piccolo to his lips once more and ran over various passages for her again. We began to drift out, the Conductor with us. The rehearsal was over as far as we were concerned.

She was so delighted, both with the ultimate perfection of their performance at the concert and with the sensation it caused throughout the musical world, that she threw us a party. It was Froy's party really, of course. He was fussed over and fêted by royal and society amateurs, eulogised anew by the critics, who could afford to let themselves go over cocktails more than they might have cared to in cold print, and it was rumoured that a great part of the evening was being spent in discussing contracts with a gramophone company, who were anxious to add the newly discovered song, complete with Froy's *obbligato*, to the Diva's existing recordings.

We visualised a long and profitable partnership between Froy's piccolo and the Soprano, and drank to their success. Good old Froy! Fine, sensitive musician. Altogether first-class. Got something too. Absolutely. A definite *je ne sais quoi*. Oh, very definite! Always had had. Anyone could see that. With half an eye. And now he was getting somewhere with his piccolo. Going places. We'd always said he would, hadn't we? Well, not in so many words, perhaps, but—

Certainly we minnows had hardly a glimpse of him from the time we arrived until the time we left. Among strangers who knew of him only by his artistic success, his physical abnormality invested him with an aloofness, a certain hauteur, a sort of portentousness, so that even quite important people like the Gramophone Tycoon stood a little in awe of him. But he was still more alone than ever. Impressively so.

For us, with not a thing on our minds and lots to celebrate, it was the jolliest of parties. In the vestibule afterwards I remember the Timpani rolling royally out, supported by a couple of Strings and an Oboe, all three of whom proved broken reeds. The Harp was both unaccompanied and upright, but a shade too *largo e maestoso*. I was just behind him, *serioso* I hoped, *ma non troppo*, for our hostess had come out into the vestibule with the Gramophone Tycoon to look for Froy. I suppose they had some last minute message for him.

He also emerged, having just struggled into his overcoat which

he rarely exerted himself to button, and in the confusion of removing his hat once more on catching sight of his hostess, he dropped a glove. I hoped he hadn't noticed it or would have the sense to ignore it, but the pantomime of the Bavarian gentleman and his little dog began all over again—only this time old Froy was three parts full of gin.

There they stood, the Diva, the Gramophone Tycoon and Froy, in the very centre of the now crowded vestibule, spotlighted. Froy sidestepped very carefully until the missing glove came into view again, and then he realised the predicament he'd got himself into. He must either try to bend down to retrieve the glove, which, if he lost his balance, could end only in disaster and ridicule, or publicly funk it—and everyone would know why. Too late now to pretend he hadn't noticed it. He peered piteously down at it, swaying a little in anticipation of the dizzy plunge, the ignominious topple.

And then help came from the most unexpected quarter: Froy's *dea ex machina* was, appropriately enough, the Diva. In a single swift ripple of a swoop she had retrieved and restored it to him.

'Don't you know you must never, never, *never* pick up your own glove?' she reproved him indulgently. 'It always brings bad luck.'

From the reverent, adoring way he received it from her I knew he'd never again wear it—on his hand, anyway.

Out in the quiet street we could hear one of the French Horns tranquilly wending his way home, *andante cantabile*, to Camden Town. Froy and I found ourselves waiting more prosaically on the kerbside for a bus to Notting Hill, but a taxi came instead and he hailed it. He clambered in abstractedly, without giving the driver any directions, so I told the man Froy's address and got in after him as a matter of course, intending to take the taxi on to my own rooms in Holland Park.

So far he hadn't spoken a word to me, and I began to feel something of an intruder, but I didn't think he was even aware of my being there at all until a jolt at the traffic lights bounced us together and he grunted: 'Huh, that you, Clarinet?'

'Rocky road to Dublin, eh?' I responded idiotically, feeling more than ever that I shouldn't be there disturbing his peace and privacy. I felt worse than an intruder now; I felt I was an eavesdropper, a Paul Pry, because I could sense a third presence in the cramped darkness. He had carried her with him from the house.

#### FROY AND HIS DIVA

I thought up an excuse in case Froy was with me enough to expect one, and was leaning forward to tell the driver to drop me at Edgware Road, when I heard Froy say: 'Ever been in love, Clarinet?'

It must be the gin, I told myself, but remembered uneasily that even on occasions when I had seen him as tight as a timpani old Froy had never before strayed from his decorous banalities to the intimate or the infinite.

I hastily adapted myself to this newly-discovered romantic vein of his. 'Once or twice,' I admitted nonchalantly.

He received in silence my effort to make light of it and, just as for the second time I was about to rap on the driver's glass partition, he asked abruptly: 'How old are you?'

'Twenty-seven, sir,' I answered up automatically.

It had the most extraordinary effect upon him.

'Don't call me Sir!' he cried out. 'I'm only thirty-three!'

It was a sob, a great cataclysm of a sob.

I had always rather vaguely assumed that with that collop of a jowl and that preposterous paunch of his he must be quite fifty. But now I never doubted him. That terrible cataclysmic sob was a lamentation unto the gods, a heroic howl of Promethean protest against the intolerable burden of clay that was slowly smothering his little spark of divine fire. Already it had cheated him, still young, of his youth.

I don't suppose that many young men of twenty-seven have been called upon to deal with such a situation, or that any of them would know what to say if they were. I didn't. I felt tied hand and foot by my very freedom. Young and unfettered, whatever I said by way of commiseration must surely stink of patronage. As for sympathy, I had never known and never could experience his own peculiar tragedy, and so the very word was a mockery I dared not utter.

Although it seemed a coward's way out, I believe I did the best thing in saying nothing, doing nothing. My feelings surged up so overwhelmingly that I think they reached out to him, touched him almost physically, so that Froy sensed the presence of a friend in the cramped darkness, just as I had earlier the woman.

He said no more until just before we reached the gaunt house off Ladbroke Grove, where he had a flatlet, which was really a bed-sitting-room with a couple of gas-points and a sink. Then,



between pride and humiliation, he confided to me: 'Did you see? She stooped and picked up my glove to save me from making a fool of myself.'

The taxi stopped for him, and I knew that the rest of the evening would be spent in maudlin tears beside his gas-fire. Already I could see them splashing with the silver sixpences into the meter.

\* \* \*

Froy made his recording for the gramophone company and emerged from the anonymity of one of the seventy-four members of the New Philharmonic into the rather dubious renown of 'that *obbligato* man of hers.' However, the song, which turned out not to be by Purcell after all, but by some lesser composer of the period, had quite a vogue and the record sold well. Other sopranos with other piccolo-players performed it up and down the country in concert-halls and over the radio, but none of them ever attempted it twice: no one seemed able to bring to it what Froy and his Diva had given. So the public insisted upon their performance and their performance only, and the record sold better than ever.

Thanks to the generous terms she had obtained for him from the gramophone company, Froy was doing quite well. The original contract brought others, but although there was no agreement to bind him he obstinately refused to play for any other soprano—and he had quite a few offers—even after she bought herself a villa in Italy and decided to make it her home instead of the house in St. John's Wood.

She would drop him a line once or twice a year, a friendly, chatty little note, or a flippant picture post-card, sometimes from half across the world, but on all of them there blazed at you from between the lines: Mustn't forget poor old Froy! In the privacy of his bed-sitting-room he made a pathetic point of showing me all of them as they arrived, half in exultation, half in despair, and afterwards they were always solemnly, sacrificially set alight within the black-leaded fender before the row of cold asbestos columns of his extinguished gas-fire.

I persuaded him, now that he seemed assured of a small but steady supplementary income from his gramophone royalties, to move into a real flat of his own in a modern block on Primrose Hill, which one of the Second Violins was giving up. He appreciated the streamlined comfort and convenience of the place and of course the luxury of a lift, but all the while I had the feeling that

#### FROY AND HIS DIVA

he would really rather have remained undisturbed in the twilight of Notting Hill—an old bull-frog resigned to his puddle—and had made the move simply to please me, the one intimate friend he had ever had.

By this time I had left the New Philharmonic for broadcasting, and I used my new position and contacts to push him as hard as I could. I insisted on his coming out and about with me, where he could be seen and meet people who might be useful to him. For a whole year and a half I saw that he never missed a single important party I could wangle invitations for, and shamelessly gate-crashed on the rest. I set to work on his appearance, too, sent him to specialists, saw that he faithfully carried out the treatments they prescribed, watched over his diet and at last succeeded in knocking three whole stones off his twenty-odd. This, they said, was the most he could hope for, but at least his sprawling unwieldy bulk was now disciplined into a certain compactness; so I sent him to a decent tailor for a complete new wardrobe. I gave him no peace at all, poor Froy, but he suffered me gladly because I was his friend.

I would not admit even to myself that I was doing all this in an effort to lessen the appalling gulf between him and his Diva. We rarely spoke of her, even when she wrote and a letter or a post-card had to be read and ritually burned—in an open fire now—and so I persuaded myself that Froy was and had always been completely resigned about her, and that in building up his career for him and husbanding his finances I was merely providing him with a compensatory interest in life. But for us both there remained always that possibility, that slender, tantalising possibility.

Froy now broke new ground. He, too, left the New Philharmonic and the films claimed him. At one of our duty parties we were introduced to a tired young man who, I think, can best be described as a kind of under-nanny to his company's Number One Producer. He looked ready to drop, but brightened up when I threw in with a nicely calculated casualness: 'You know Froy—the *obbligato* man.'

And on the reputation of that record, Froy found himself engaged to arrange, compose and otherwise provide a pipe-and-tabor motif for the sound-track of a highly stylised, rather precious version of 'Love's Labour's Lost.' I went rigorously into the question of fees in all three capacities and possible royalties too, not forgetting the all-important credits, and we finally emerged with a contract

which could, if the film were at all successful, bring Froy a lot nearer his Diva than either of us had dared to hope.

For I knew by now that the one thing that might give him the courage to approach her was the confidence inspired by worldly prestige and material possessions. Apart from his music, they were all that he could ever hope to gain, this side of the grave.

The preliminary consultations held in the company's Mayfair conference rooms couldn't have gone more smoothly, and soon the day arrived for Froy to be fetched from his flat in one of their limousines and driven down to the studios for the sound-track recordings. But the chauffeur couldn't have been properly briefed, for he delivered up the unsuspecting Froy to the wrong department. By the time he had been traced and rescued his head had been shaved.

The sudden obscenity of his soft, pink, grotesquely babyish hairlessness simpering back at him from a mirror so afflicted him that he couldn't bring himself to speak of it for several days, even to me. It gave him a naked, a defenceless, a ludicrously stricken look, which I was never to forget.

But the film company, appalled at the slick havoc so efficiently wrought by their Grooming Department and fearing the unwelcome publicity of a possible court case, hurriedly pressed into poor Froy's limply eloquent hand a cheque for exactly treble the amount of his fee, together with a nervous assurance that his hair would grow again in no time at all, no time at all.

It did grow again, of course, but only just in time for him to appear without the *toupet*, to which he had had to resort, at the World Première. The film owed much of its success to Froy's brilliant realisation of the Director's idea of the pipe-and-tabor motif, and he cut quite a figure in the foyer. Within the month we knew that in his modest way he had arrived.

His Diva sent him a blithe little card of congratulations from Stockholm. She was glad to hear he was getting on so nicely in films and hoped to see 'Love's Labour's Lost' for herself when she returned to London at the end of the week. But even then it was I who suggested that he should offer to take her, and he smiled that secret little smile of his I had first noticed when at rehearsal he was trying over the *obbligato*.

He didn't burn that card.

'From now on I'm going to keep them,' he announced momentarily. 'And all her cuttings too.'

#### FROY AND HIS DIVA

He went out and bought from an antique shop in the Burlington Arcade an exquisitely carved little sandalwood box to put them in. But the very first cutting after that was her picture in the lunch edition of one of the evening papers: it appeared beneath the caption set out in funereally heavy capitals—ENGAGED.

I went round to him at once, hoping he hadn't yet seen it. But he came to the door with the sandalwood box in his hand. We went into the sitting-room, where he had a log fire burning—it was cold still for the time of year.

'Just a moment,' he said, in the most matter-of-fact way, 'I must put this on too.'

Presently the room was filled with its fragrance.

And then she arrived. She had never sought him out like this before.

'Just as well you're here too!' she greeted me gaily as I let her in. 'As a newly-engaged woman I shouldn't really be here at all, should I? But then of course it's different with Froy.'

He must have heard it all through the open door, and that last remark was all the more lethal for its innocence.

As she crossed the sitting-room to him she cried: 'Oh, what a heavenly perfume! What is it?'

And spread her wanton fingers to the blaze.

'Sandalwood,' he said.

Following his glance she saw only a fire of logs.

'But how extravagant of you!' she exclaimed.

'In future I shall be less—prodigal,' he admonished her, but she was used to his solemn manner and thought nothing of it.

'I won't keep you a moment,' she raced on, 'because I'm on my way to a fitting at my dressmaker's and I've a taxi waiting outside, but I've come to ask you a favour, a very special sort of favour.'

It was, of course, to play at the wedding.

'With pleasure,' he said conventionally, and I caught my breath as he added: 'If we may afterwards have your song with my *obbligato*.'

'Oh, I'm so glad you suggested it yourself,' she effused.

'In the circumstances I can think of nothing more—fitting,' he remarked, so jerkily that I hustled her out and down to her taxi.

'Aren't you being rather too generous?' I asked him afterwards.

'Are you sure you can go through with it?'

'I shan't be going through with it,' he replied with a disquieting equanimity.

'But you've promised.'

'Yes, I've promised.'

'What reason will you give, then?'

'None. I just shan't turn up.'

I was appalled. This wasn't our gentle, easy-going Froy. Beneath his composure there lurked a violence which brought back to me the constrained, Promethean darkness of our taxi-ride to Notting Hill.

'But you can't do that to her!' I exclaimed, inanely trite. 'She'll never speak to you again.'

'That's what I want. Easiest way out.'

'After all her kindness, and the interest she's shown in you?' I stupidly persisted.

'It's not her kindly interest I happen to want,' he said, with such an arrogantly crushing finality that I very nearly called him Sir again.

\* \* \*

I had just a month in which to wean him from his purpose but then I never seriously thought he would hold to it. All he needed, I argued, was a little time to get over it, a week, ten days, a fortnight, and then, in no time at all, no time at all—Where, I wondered uneasily, had I just recently heard those glibly reassuring words?

In about a week's time I would ask him as casually as I could what music he thought of choosing for the service, just as though nothing had happened. But when I did, and tentatively suggested the obvious Bach or Handel, he gave me an angelic smile—more that of a fallen and slightly sinister angel, I remember thinking uncomfortably—and said, without a trace of interest: 'Yes, that's a splendid idea.' It was almost as though he were humouring me.

In the end I myself adapted some Bach for the piccolo and clarinet and decided to accompany him myself—more, I'm afraid, because I thought that in his present state of mind it would be safer and more convenient, than out of any musical consideration. Froy's Voluntary—was there ever such a misnomer!—was fast becoming something to be lived through, got through as decently as possible.



#### FROY AND HIS DIVA

As for their song with the *obbligato* afterwards, I knew that mercifully there was no need, nor ever would be, for rehearsal, and felt that anyway any mention of it from me would be an impertinence.

I was getting really anxious about Froy's trance-like stupor as the month drew to an end. In spite of his having been forbidden alcohol by the doctors, I think I should almost have welcomed a bout or two of heavy drinking from him, and so I was relieved more than anything when, after a final deathly rehearsal on the eve of the wedding, he suggested we should go down to the old local and see if any of the boys from the New Philharmonic were there. (Could it have been the old bull-frog seeking refuge in his puddle?)

The bar was full of them: they had been rehearsing late for a symphony concert the next day, and you could see things hadn't gone too well with them either, so Froy got an ovation. They'd missed his cosy, reassuring presence, and the draught had souged too long through the vast gap it had left. And now here he was back in his old place, propping up the wall, one elbow on the bar, just when they all needed him most.

Look who's here! Well, well, well! - Where'd old Froy been hiding himself all this time? Coy Froy! Behind the Kensington Gasworks—or the Earl's Court Exhibition! Where else could he? Looking very fit, anyway. Lost a bit of weight, too, hadn't he? That must be the films. Up at the crack of dawn, on the set all day, what? Just wait till his next picture! He'd be the star in that! Put Errol Flynn's nose right out of joint! Good old Froy! What was he having? Gin? Gin! And so say all of us! And so say all of us!

It developed into a full-scale celebration. Each one of them clamoured to stand him a drink, and in return he stood them all round after round. There was such an awful lot to celebrate—the recordings, the broadcasts, the now world-famous pipe-and-tabor motif; the new flat, the weight he'd lost, the Diva's wedding to-morrow. They even dragged in that wretched bit of Bach I had mutilated for the Voluntary.

Good old Froy! Fine, sensitive musician. First-class. Always did say he'd got something, didn't we? Always did say he'd go places. And now, here he was, right at the top of the tree. Top of the tree! Top of the bloody ol' tree. Good old Froy! Goo' ol' Froy!

The quiet drink or two with old friends had now passed from a celebration into an orgy quite beyond my control. It was impossible to get him away until closing time, and then with the help of two or three of the soberer ones I managed to manoeuvre him through the side door into a little back street.

I had never seen him so drunk.

Outside he was quite incapable of putting one foot before the other, and everything depended on whether three of us could keep him upright against the wall until the fourth fetched a taxi. In a state of sweating exhaustion we took it in turns to thrust our shoulders beneath his armpits, to clasp him about the knees—it was impossible to clasp him anywhere else. Each time we thought we had him safely propped a new subsidence threatened and we had feverishly to race round to one another's rescue. It was nightmarish, like being in charge of a doped elephant.

'Come on, Froy,' I urged, looking desperately round for the taxi. 'Busy day to-morrow. Time you were getting home.'

'Certainly,' he replied expansively. 'Only too delighted.' And added with an elephantine twinkle: 'If you can get me there.'

I glanced at him sharply. Through his besottedness there seemed to run a single sober thread. It was uncanny. Like an actor submerged in his part and yet capable of watching his own performance.

As the taxi at last came round the distant corner he broke free from us, somehow lurched across the pavement to a lamp-post, steadied himself and then, as though remembering a task he had set himself, he solemnly laid himself down in the gutter. There was no collapse: it might have been the deliberate charade of a sober man.

'Goo'-night,' he murmured, tranquilly composing himself for sleep, his purpose achieved. 'Busy day to-morrow. Busy day. Ssh! Ssh! For Christopher Robin is saying his prayers. God bless the bridegroom, and God bless the bride, and may a goo' time be had by all.'

By the time the taxi had pulled up he was snoring with raucous complacency.

This was the end. What could the four or five of us do against that tremendous pull of gravity? And at any moment a policeman might come upon us, spelling scandal and ruin in his note-book.

This time Froy's *deus ex machina* was the taxi-driver.

'Cor', he crowed softly, gazing in admiration at our stranded whale. 'Block and tackle job, this!'

Then, with a reassuring 'Arf a mo'!' over his shoulder, he nipped across the street and disappeared resourcefully into the rear of a rather obscurely placed fire-station, from which he returned, as good as his word, riding in triumph with a crew of three upon a motor-truck. I viewed their uniforms with misgiving, but there was a comfortably unofficial air about them, just as though they had torn themselves from an off-duty game of billiards for a moment or two to oblige. They lost no time, however, in manœuvring their truck into position. I noticed a sort of crane mounted behind.

'Just the job, ain't she?' the taxi-driver observed, rubbing his hands with professional satisfaction. 'Aven't 'ad 'er aht since we was in the Light Rescue, back in the old blitz.'

He then busied himself pushing back the hood of his taxi while his former colleagues fastened a kind of breeches-buoy about the peacefully slumbering Froy and hoisted him on high. There they let him dangle in the lamplight for an unreal moment. I think they were fascinated, knowing that never again in a lifetime would they behold such a sight.

Then he was gently lowered into the taxi, like cargo into a ship's hold, and within another minute or two the firemen had disappeared with their truck once again up their alley-way, and our taxi was heading for Primrose Hill.

Outside the block of flats the five of us, a perambulating playpen about our gargantuan toddler, got Froy safely up the steps, into the lift, out again, across the corridor and into his flat. There, having rewarded the taxi-driver and said good-night to the boys, I was free at last to throw myself upon the settee in the sitting-room for the night, too weary with anxiety and sheer physical effort to notice whether I was warm or chilly, comfortable or cramped. And to-morrow, to-morrow was the wedding.

I woke reasonably early, telephoned to my rooms for some suitable clothes to be sent over for me, and took in to Froy all the hangover remedies I could lay hands on.

As soon as he had come to enough to realise that he was safe at home in his own bed, he demanded in an aggrieved tone to know why he hadn't been arrested and locked up.

'Through no omission of yours, rest assured,' I retorted sourly.

'Then who was it who slipped up?' he complained, querulously pompous, 'Because I distinctly remember lying down in the gutter.'

Slipped up indeed! It was my turn, I thought, to sound aggrieved. I gave him a pretty nasty recital of the night's work, sparing him nothing, not even the ignominious details of his having been loaded like a bale of merchandise through the open roof of the taxi.

He was furious with me, though not from any sense of vanity or outraged dignity.

'What right had you to interfere?' he shouted. 'Can't a man get himself drunk and incapable and be left in peace to be arrested if he has a mind to? And to think I'd got as far as snoring in the gutter!'

I remembered the single, sober thread, the apparently deliberate charade beneath the street-lamp.

'Froy!' I cried. 'You planned it all!'

Thrusting me aside, he heaved himself out of bed. 'But it's not too late now,' he muttered. 'It's not too late now.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Go round and give myself up.'

'What for?'

'What I should have been arrested for last night if the police had done their duty properly. Just like them! Never a one in sight when he's wanted!'

'But you're stone-cold sober now—or are you?'

'Never mind,' he retorted acidly. 'Thanks to you I can describe to them exactly what I was like last night—the block and tackle to get me up, the snores in the gutter, Christopher Robin and all!'

'They'd never believe you,' I mumbled, shame-faced.

'I have my witnesses,' he said in cold, hurt defiance. 'The Third Trombone, the Second Flute, the French Horn——' He paused, ominously reproachful. 'And you too.'

'You know you'd get nothing out of any of us.'

His defiance turned pitifully to the bravado of a frightened, desperate child.

'Then I'll call the Fire Brigade!'

'Nothing doing there either,' I replied. 'It was all strictly unofficial and off the record. The men won't remember anything about it. If they did they'd get into serious trouble.'

FROY AND HIS DIVA

'I see,' he breathed. It was a great sigh of deflation. And again, forlornly, 'I see.'

There followed a wretched silence which I cut short by adjuring him gruffly to stop being such a bloody fool, which turned him tearful.

'It was my only way out,' he whimpered. 'My only way out.' Of course it was. Too late I began to regret my trite resentment, my wanton, slow-witted malice.

'What am I to do now?' he went on. 'I can't go through with it, and I can't stop away either, with nothing to prevent me. Whatever *am* I to do?'

I pulled him down on to the bed again and sat beside him, reasoning with him.

'Now, look,' I said. 'You're going down to some church or other where you will hide yourself up in the organ-loft in order to play through a perfectly execrable arrangement of Bach, and I, the arranger, will do my best to see you through. Never mind whose wedding it is. Try not to think of that. Just get on with the music. That's the main thing. It will need all your attention, believe me. You can give the reception and the *obbligato* a miss. Say you've been taken ill or something. But you must put in an appearance at the church.'

As he listened to me all the resistance oozed out of him.

'I knew it would end like this unless I did something drastic,' he lamented. 'I knew I'd somehow have to get things taken right out of my hands.'

When he was ready dressed and we were setting out together, he said: 'I may as well go through with the *obbligato* at the reception too. Right through to the bitter end.'

So I got him to the wedding.

If only by some miracle poor Froy had been the bridegroom he would, in his nervous state of twittering bliss, have been the first facetiously to declare himself a lamb brought to the slaughter. Unsaid, in cold, cruel reality, it was only too true. It was nothing short of immolation.

Up in the pagan twilight of the organ-loft we were utterly remote from the bright ceremony going on among the flowers and candles below. And Froy, the passionate, Promethean Froy, was slowly dying. Poor old Pan was expiring, breathing his last into his pipes.

Certainly no one could have recognised our *duo* as Bach, and



MARY MURRY

I was told afterwards that its effect was quite unearthly and eerily moving. But then people are never so easily moved as at a wedding. They feel cheated if they aren't.

At the reception Froy rallied and played the *obbligato* for his Diva as he had at that first rehearsal. All the freshness was there, the excitement, the exploratory caress, the swift pursuit, the tenderness—and with it all the brittle, sparkling purity of tone. And once again that rare moment of cracking, straining silence before the explosion of applause.

This time Froy employed it to snap his piccolo in two across his knee.

The bridegroom and some of the guests seemed alarmed, but not the bride. She was enchanted. She took it, bless her, for a graceful compliment, a piece of artistic gallantry, a chivalrous gesture akin to the shattering of a glass from which a loyal toast has been drunk. But for me it wasn't difficult to recognise it as a renunciation, a farewell. Just how final I had yet to learn.

During the next few days I worried a lot about Froy's state of mind. I was scared of these sudden outbursts of mental violence beneath his apparent docility and quiet, matter-of-fact manner. I shrank from suggesting a psychiatrist, so I compromised, fatally alas, and persuaded him that he needed a holiday.

He caught on quite eagerly to the idea and said he'd like to go to the South of France and perhaps Italy if the money lasted. As usual I made the arrangements, but I was so relieved to see him apparently taking an interest in something at last that I sent him along with his passport to arrange with his bank about the money. He seemed pleased to be able to do something for himself and trotted off at once.

The day came. We were to have met at the airport, but Froy never turned up. I waited for him and missed our flight. There were no more vacancies so I returned to town. He wasn't at his flat—I'd always had a key of my own—and his luggage had gone too. I 'phoned back to the airport to make sure he hadn't got there after I had left and taken advantage of a last-minute vacancy, and then I sat down to wait for his return. But I never saw him again.

I spent a hideous night with Froy's vast form constantly before me, spread-eagled in mid-air, falling, always falling—into the Thames, in front of a tube train, off the flat roof of the block.

And as he fell I heard again and again that rending cataclysm of a sob: 'Don't call me *Sir*! I'm only thirty-three!'

In the morning I found out from his bank that he had taken his currency in American dollars and, as an emigrant, had arranged for more to be sent out to him through a bank in Los Angeles. I cabled and then wrote to him there several times but never received a reply. Finally I made enquiries through someone I knew who had gone out to Hollywood with a film contract, and learned eventually that Froy was making a modest though quite a comfortable living filling fat men parts in third-rate slapstick.

His speciality was a drunk sequence in which a host of devoted but diminutive buddies valiantly rallied round to save their big buddy from the cops. Sometimes they were firemen, sometimes musicians, sometimes a baseball team; once it was ice-hockey, with the whole thing played on skates and a whale of a goal-keeper.

The variations were infinite, but the theme distressingly the same, and I saw from the stills sent me that he appeared exactly as he must have caught sight of himself back in that Grooming Department, shaven poll and all. It never failed, so I was assured, to convulse the customers.

But for me that naked, stricken look of his had now become tragically ludicrous. It had never occurred to me, as it ought to have done, that he might commit that sort of suicide.

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1951

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
Baker Street, 221B? By <i>J. E. Holroyd</i> . . . . .	244
Barrett and Mr. Hunter, Miss. By <i>Betty Miller</i> . . . . .	83
<i>Bates, H. E.</i> : The Flag . . . . .	3
— The Grass God (Supplement 1) . . . . .	5
<i>Bell, Clive</i> : Recollections of Lytton Strachey . . . . .	11
Bend Back, The. By <i>Elizabeth Bowen</i> . . . . .	221
<i>Berridge, Elizabeth</i> : The Nightcap . . . . .	303
<i>Blanch, Lesley</i> : The Fading Garden and the Forgotten Rose . . . . .	228
<i>Bowen, Elizabeth</i> : The Bend Back . . . . .	221
Burke, After Reading. By <i>W. Somerset Maugham</i> . . . . .	28
Cappadocia, The Rock Monasteries Of. By <i>Patrick Leigh Fermor</i> . . . . .	120
<i>Cary, Joyce</i> : Umaru . . . . .	50
— A Special Occasion . . . . .	387
<i>Celeyran, Marie Tapie de</i> : 'Our Uncle Lautrec' . . . . .	259
Chapels on the Riviera. By <i>Francis Steegmuller</i> . . . . .	22
Cocteau: The Frivolous Prince, Jean. By <i>Geoffrey Wagner</i> . . . . .	358
Education of a Prince, The. By <i>F. W. Gibbs</i> . . . . .	105
Egyptology, The New. By <i>Walter Smart</i> . . . . .	67
Episode at Gastein. By <i>William Sansom</i> (Supplement 1) . . . . .	59
Fading Garden and the Forgotten Rose, The. By <i>Lesley Blanch</i> . . . . .	228
<i>Fenton, Roger</i> : Photographs of Crimean War . . . . .	77
<i>Fermor, Patrick Leigh</i> : The Rock Monasteries of Cappadocia . . . . .	120
— The Monasteries of the Air . . . . .	195
Flag, The. By <i>H. E. Bates</i> . . . . .	3
Forger Versus Critic. By <i>Lawrence Gowing</i> . . . . .	396
Froy and His Diva. By <i>Mary Murry</i> . . . . .	396
<i>Gibbins, John</i> : A Sum of Summers . . . . .	326
<i>Gibbs, F. W.</i> : The Education of a Prince . . . . .	105
<i>Gowing, Lawrence</i> : Forger Versus Critic . . . . .	396
Grass God, The. By <i>H. E. Bates</i> (Supplement 1) . . . . .	5
<i>Harcourt-Smith, Simon</i> : Winter's Heat . . . . .	327
<i>Holroyd, J. E.</i> : 221B Baker Street? . . . . .	244
<i>Johnston, Charles</i> : Translation of Garcia Lorca . . . . .	155
<i>King, Francis</i> : The Last Meeting . . . . .	324
— The Return . . . . .	325
Lady in the Gondola, The. By <i>Iris Origo</i> . . . . .	308
<i>Lancaster, Osbert</i> : The Ungrateful Heart . . . . .	162
— The Last Rose of Summer . . . . .	341
<i>Lane, Margaret</i> : Wine The Mockers . . . . .	97
Last Meeting, The. By <i>Francis King</i> . . . . .	324
Last Rose of Summer, The. By <i>Osbert Lancaster</i> . . . . .	341
'Lautrec, Our Uncle.' By <i>Marie Tapie de Celeyran</i> . . . . .	259
<i>Lewis, Naomi</i> : A Visit to Mrs. Wilcox . . . . .	145

# CONTENTS

iii

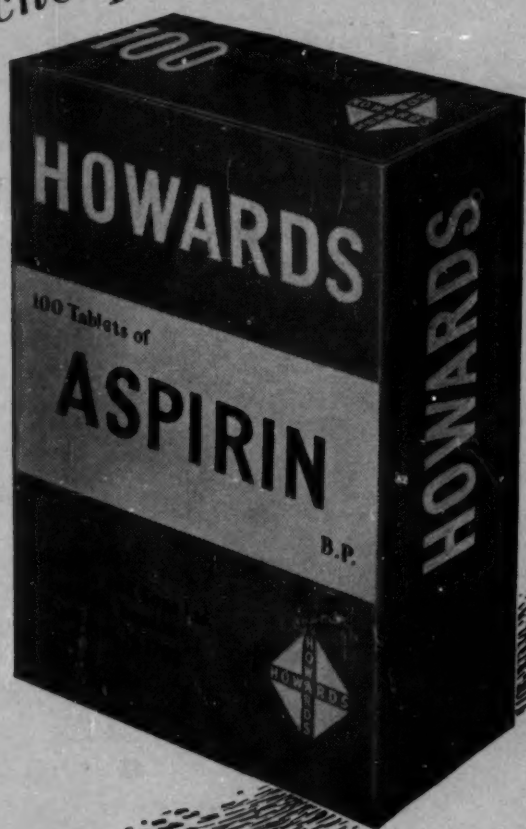
	PAGE
<i>Maugham, W. Somerset</i> : After Reading Burke . . . . .	28
<i>Miller, Arthur</i> : Monte Saint Angelo . . . . .	181
<i>Miller, Betty</i> : Miss Barrett and Mr. Hunter . . . . .	83
Monasteries of the Air, The. By <i>Patrick Leigh Fermor</i> . . . . .	195
Monte Saint Angelo. By <i>Arthur Miller</i> . . . . .	181
<i>Murry, Mary</i> : Froy and His Diva . . . . .	396
Music in Germany I. By <i>Nicolas Nabokov</i> . . . . .	125
<i>Nabokov, Nicolas</i> : Music in Germany I . . . . .	125
— On the 'Battlefront' of Soviet Music . . . . .	236
Nightcap. By <i>Elizabeth Berridge</i> . . . . .	303
<i>O'Connor, Frank</i> : The Rising . . . . .	273
<i>Origo, Iris</i> : The Lady in the Gondola . . . . .	308
Photographs of Crimean War. By <i>Roger Fenton</i> . . . . .	77
Poems by Garcia Lorca. Translated by <i>Charles Johnston</i> . . . . .	155
Poet as Hero : The Letters of John Keats, The. By <i>Lionel Trilling</i> . . . . .	281
<i>Procter, Ida</i> : Elizabeth Siddal : The Ghost of an Idea . . . . .	368
<i>Quennell, Peter</i> : Temples in Sicily . . . . .	55
— Sicilian Notebook . . . . .	134
Return, The. By <i>Francis King</i> . . . . .	325
Rising, The. By <i>Frank O'Connor</i> . . . . .	273
<i>Sansom, William</i> : Episode at Gastein (Supplement 1) . . . . .	59
Sicilian Notebook. By <i>Peter Quennell</i> . . . . .	134
Siddal : The Ghost of an Idea, Elizabeth. By <i>Ida Procter</i> . . . . .	368
<i>Smart, Walter</i> : A New Egyptology . . . . .	67
Soviet Music, On the 'Battlefront' of. By <i>Nicolas Nabokov</i> . . . . .	236
Special Occasion, A. By <i>Joyce Cary</i> . . . . .	387
<i>Steegmüller, Francis</i> : Chapels on the Riviera . . . . .	22
Strachey, Recollections of Lytton. By <i>Clive Bell</i> . . . . .	11
Sum of Summers, A. By <i>John Gibbins</i> . . . . .	326
Temples in Sicily. By <i>Peter Quennell</i> . . . . .	55
<i>Trilling, Lionel</i> : The Port as Hero : the Letters of John Keats . . . . .	281
Umaru. By <i>Joyce Cary</i> . . . . .	50
Ungrateful Heart, The. By <i>Osbert Lancaster</i> . . . . .	162
<i>Wagner, Geoffrey</i> : Jean Cocteau : The Frivolous Prince . . . . .	358
Wilcox, A Visit to Mrs. By <i>Naomi Lewis</i> . . . . .	145
Wine the Mockery. By <i>Margaret Lane</i> . . . . .	97
Winter's Heat. By <i>Simon Harcourt-Smith</i> . . . . .	327



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 No. 2,682 5th Year FRIDAY DECEMBER 14 1951 PRICE 6d

CONTENTS

Leading Article: The Personality of Galsworthy 501  
 Fiction: Robinson's Foreign Policy 507  
 Memoirs: Browne's Unpublished Memoirs 504

Art: The Museum of Great Britain: Picture Gallery, British Museum (The Dept. of Antiquities and Minerals) 502

Science: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503  
 The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

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Bookselling: The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 503

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